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*B E C K E T T*

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*E C O N O M I C S*

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## List of Contents.

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Acknowledgements.	3
Author's Declaration.	4
Abstract.	5
Referencing.	6
0. Introduction: 'The Dismal Science.'	9
1. The Theme of the Five Biscuits.	66
2. Black Markets.	110
3. Hating Beckett / The Unexchangeable.	138
4. Safe Words.	177
5. Conclusion: 'The Radiant Measure.'	210
6. Postscript: 'Life in Common.'	225
Works Cited.	234

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Author's Declaration.

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I declare that this thesis is my own work. Part of chapter 2 will be published in forthcoming special issue of the *Journal of Beckett Studies*, '(Dis)Embodied Beckett' (2018). It has not been and will not be submitted, in whole or in part, to another University for the award of any other degree.

Dominic Walker

\_\_\_\_\_ July 2017.

This thesis investigates the economic themes and structures in Samuel Beckett's prose texts from 1932 to 1964. It aims to understand the difficulties of imagining a political context for Beckett's writing, and identifies two main obstacles to doing so: the downward shift in economic perspective from *More Pricks than Kicks* (1934) to *Molloy* (1951) implies a logic of value that prioritises 'indifference' and withdrawal from material concerns ('nothing to gain'); and the category of representation has been destabilised by an effort to make the 'metaphysical' and the 'concrete' interchangeable, where the latter is often economic in nature. Chapter 1 addresses the 'closed system' of desire in *Murphy* (1938), a theory of value with equivalents in economic and psychoanalysis; the novel's unemployment plot spells out its ramifications for writing and production in general. Chapter two considers two variant passages about economics from the *Watt* typescript (1945) and the notebooks of *Molloy* (1947), and concludes that they show Beckett turning against a formal interest in equilibrium ('the depths where demand and supply coincide'). Chapter 3 sees Beckett's post-war texts, with 'vague[n]ed' referents inviting innumerable possible readings, moving towards a new form of value based on equivalence and interchangeability. Chapter 4 sees this logic of equivalence intercalated through *How It Is* (1964) [1961], and takes the torturer-tortured relationship as a readymade figure for a readerly economy that leaves punishingly little room for a reader; it finds that Beckett's overlapping fascinations with torture and circulation are inextricable from the resistances of his writing to persuasive political restatements. The thesis ends by arguing that Beckett's economics is more 'concrete' because it can be taken for lenient otherworldliness.

The first reference to a text is provided in the footnotes in each chapter, so the reader does not have to track back to find it. The same principle applies to the publication dates of texts, e.g. *Molloy* (1951). Square brackets are used to indicate the date of composition or original publication in French or German.

Subsequent references are given in-text. The format for in-text references is (Author YEAR, #). If the reference is to a primary text, the abbreviations are as follows:

*Act Without Words II* = (AWW II, #)  
'Company' = (Co, #)  
'Ding Dong' = (DD, #)  
*Dream of Fair to Middling Women* = (Dr, #)  
*Endgame* = (En, #)  
'The Expelled' = (TE, #)  
'L'Expulsé' = (Ex, #)  
'First Love' = (FL, #)  
'The German Letter of 1937' = (GL, #)  
*How It Is* = (HII, #)  
*The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Vol. 1* = (LSB 1, #)  
*The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Vol. 2* = (LSB 2, #)  
*The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Vol. 3* = (LSB 3, #)  
*Malone Dies* = (MD, #)  
*Molloy* = (Mo, #)  
*Murphy* = (Mu, #)  
*Proust* = (Pr, #)  
'Three Dialogues with George Duthuit' = (TD, #)  
*The Unnamable* = (Un, #)  
*Waiting for Godot* = (Go, #)  
*Watt* = (Wa, #)

After the first reference to texts from Sigmund Freud's *Standard Edition*, references are given in the format (Freud YEAR, #), where the year is the original year of

publication, not the year of publication of the *Standard Edition*. The same principle applies to references to Melanie Klein's two volumes of *Collected Works*.





*This is thought in accordance with the capitalist market, which B[eckett] takes at its word.*

- Theodor Adorno, 'Notes on Beckett' (1962).<sup>2</sup>

This thesis investigates the economic themes and structures in Samuel Beckett's prose texts from 1932 to 1964. It asks two main overlapping questions: what theories of value can be found in these texts, and to what extent is the economic content of the work only figurative. It finds in Beckett something like a critique of political economy, where this means a satire on the two value-forms associated with capitalism, the solipsism of subjective value and the indifference of abstract objective value. It provides context in economic theory and history where relevant, though it is careful not to overstate its claims about the specific nature of the relationship between aesthetic forms and material events or theoretical discourses; it finds that Beckett mimes the difficulty of ascertaining that relationship. It argues that Beckett's work has produced a distinctive economy of reading, in which texts prescribe and prohibit interpretations with inimitable tenacity, imbricating the reader-object in uncomfortable intersubjective economies of deprivation and domination; this is especially true of the *Four Novellas* (1977) [1946-7] and *Molloy* (1951) [1948]. It finds that the increasingly violent, unequal relationships that appear in Beckett's writing over this period, culminating in *How It Is* (1964) [1961], are readymade figures for these readerly economies, and traces them back through *Murphy's* (1938) 'closed system' of desire to *Watt's* (1953) [1945] insistence on equilibrium in writing and dinner.<sup>3</sup> The thesis interprets them twice, from

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Carlyle, 'Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question', *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country*, Vol. XL (1849), p. 672.

<sup>2</sup> Theodor Adorno, 'Notes on Beckett', trans. Dirk Van Hulle and Shane Weller, *Journal of Beckett Studies* 19.2, 2010, p. 173.

<sup>3</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Murphy*, ed. J. C. C. Mays (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 2009), p. 38.

a Marxist perspective and a feminist psychoanalytic one, paying special attention to the creatures of *How It Is*, who tear through indifferently exchangeable objects in the hopeless attempt to encounter anything but the echo of their own appetite. It notices this ‘logic of substitution’ at work in the representational economy of Beckett’s writing, where numerous pseudo-symbols and possible referents circulate equivalently, leaving the reader unable to separate out ‘vague[n]’ and determinate content, pseudo-allegory and representation, and making us imagine that the many stark and unmistakable deictic markers, like poverty or torture, are about something else, imbuing them with lenient otherworldliness.<sup>4</sup> The thesis concludes that one of Beckett’s key tropes is a two-way symbolic relationship between the ‘metaphysical’ and the ‘concrete’, where the latter is often economics; more specifically, it is a bathos on the possibility of using economics as a bathos of metaphysics.<sup>5</sup> This ambiguity demands the reader descend from representation to particularity, since it is impossible to breathe up there among the overtones; but it also therefore blocks any meaningful descent, dooming the reader to the solipsism of their absolutely particular hermeneutic use-value. The thesis understands this double-bind as a kind of Amfortas’s spear, a healing parody of a logic of equivalence that lights a ‘way out’ of hellish indifferent circulation, however dimly, that is also not the solipsism of subjective value.<sup>6</sup>

From beginning to end, Beckett’s oeuvre is underwritten with themes of work and worklessness, possession and dispossession, productiveness and sterility, accumulation and scarcity. There is no novel from *Murphy* to *Molloy* that does not concern the

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<sup>4</sup> ‘[L]ogic of substitution’ is David Lloyd’s indispensable phrase. The imperative ‘vague[n]’ appears in the margin of the first page of the typescript of both acts of *Happy Days* (1961). David Lloyd, *Irish Culture and Colonial Modernity 1800–2000: The Transformation of Oral Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 212. Rosemary Pountney, *Theatre of Shadows: Samuel Beckett’s Drama, 1956–1976* (Gerard’s Cross: Colin Smythe, 1988), p. 149.

<sup>5</sup> The term ‘metaphysical concrete’ appears in a diary entry dated 26 November 1936. Beckett seems to be giving priority to the ‘metaphysical’, so the sense is “the ‘metaphysical’ made ‘concrete’, or immanent in ‘objects’”. I will suggest that this sense changes over time, with a reciprocal relationship developing between the two terms, perhaps even prioritising the ‘concrete’. Cited in Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett’s German Diaries 1936–1937* (London: Continuum, 2011), p. 172.

<sup>6</sup> Beckett, ‘The Lost Ones’, in S. E. Gontarski (ed.), *The Complete Short Prose of Samuel Beckett, 1929–1989* (New York: Grove Press, 1995), p. 46.

relationship between a boss and employee, or master and servant; and later texts like *Waiting for Godot* (1951) [1948], *All That Fall* (1956), *Act Without Words I and II* (1956-7) and *Endgame* (1957) also prominently feature employment and servitude. Questions of waste and distribution are never far from Beckett's imagination, especially in *Watt*; and the enigma of value, an obsession in *Proust* (1930) and *Murphy*, continues to be important to his thinking as late as *Worstward Ho* (1986). At a structural level, circulation and exchange are recurring motifs, whether it is Molloy and his sucking stones or the exchangeable bodies of *How It Is* (*Mo*, 63-69). And *Murphy*'s 'closed system', a fundamental and divisive problem for modern economics, is a constant concern up to 'The Lost Ones' (1971) [1970] and even *What Where* (1983).<sup>7</sup>

Recent Beckett criticism has begun to consider his writing in economic terms, though often only briefly or tangentially, and only once in terms of economics as an academic discipline. Laura Salisbury's *Samuel Beckett: Laughing Matters, Comic Timing* (2012) touches on Beckett's conceptualisation of 'habit' in *Proust* (1930), arguing that it participates in 'the logic of capitalist production in its "labour-saving principles"'.<sup>8</sup> She also argues that a variant passage in the third *Molloy* notebook (1948) is 'a parody of a perfectly ordered petit-bourgeois world and a smoothly functioning capitalist economy based on the uninterrupted passage of consumption and excrement' (Salisbury 2012, 99). Adam Winstanley's "*Grâce aux Excréments des Citoyens*": Beckett, Swift and the Coprophagic Economy of Ballyba' (2014) considers the same passage. But instead of a smoothly functioning capitalist economy, Winstanley finds a satire of 'the parsimonious tendencies' of 'overly retentive' forms of 'political economy', as well as a historically specific 'indictment of Ireland's retentive economy policy', when the country sought to 'accumulate material resources whilst its European neighbours

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<sup>7</sup> Sheila Dow, 'Modernism and Postmodernism: A Dialectical Analysis', in Stephen Cullenberg, Jack Amariglio and David F. Ruccio (eds.), *Postmodernism, Economics and Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 62.

<sup>8</sup> Laura Salisbury, *Samuel Beckett: Laughing Matters, Comic Timing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p. 109.

struggle[d] to find clean sources of drinking water'.<sup>9</sup> Edouard Magessa O'Reilly adds a metaphysical dimension to the debate. His extravagantly titled essay, '*Molloy*, Part II, Where the Shit Hits the Fan: Ballyba's Economy and the Worth of the World' (2006), concludes that Ballyba's economy 'metonymically reduces [the] material and social world (bureaucracy, technology, social status, etc.) [...] to shit', because Beckett wishes to renounce such worldly, economic concerns in preference of 'the inward search for the source of voice and self'.<sup>10</sup> In 'Post-war Beckett: Resistance, Commitment or Communist Krap?' (2008), Jackie Blackman notes that Beckett's unperformed 1947 play *Eleuthéria* (1995) makes reference to Taylorism, a theory of "scientific" management concerned with maximising worker efficiency.<sup>11</sup> Blackman argues that, while *Eleuthéria*'s main target is 'the existentialist/Marxist dogmas that defined *après-guerre* "commitment"', it also contains a coded 'political *exposé*, the main thrust of which seems to be the interrelatedness of capitalism, fascism and communism in their dehumanising ideologies of labour' (Blackman 2008, 68). Andrew Gibson takes a similarly historical approach to *Murphy* in *Samuel Beckett: Critical Lives* (2010). Touching briefly on economics, Gibson argues that *Murphy*'s unemployment plot represents an anti-imperialist 'struggle against the English morality of work' and 'the system of value which subtends it'.<sup>12</sup> The 'law of exchange' is emphasised in *Murphy* because Irish migrants were often considered 'unusually hardworking', so Murphy's 'indolence' and avoidance of work is an especially pointed refusal to participate in 'the economism of the host country and the economic logic of the typical Irish migrant' (Gibson 2010, 70). The '*Quid pro quo*' exchange between Murphy and Celia, a sex-worker, accentuates the theme (*Mu*, 3).

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<sup>9</sup> Adam Winstanley, "'Grâce aux Excréments des Citoyens": Beckett, Swift and the Coprophagic Economy of Ballyba', in Dirk Van Hulle, Mark Nixon and David Tucker (eds.), *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui: Revisiting Molloy, Malone Meurt/Malone Dies and L'Innomable/The Unnamable* (New York: Editions Rodopi B. V., 2014), p. 99, 95.

<sup>10</sup> Edouard Magessa O'Reilly, '*Molloy*, Part II, Where the Shit Hits the Fan: Ballyba's Economy and the Worth of the World', *Genetic Joyce Studies*, Issue 6, 2006, Web, 18 November 2016.

<sup>11</sup> Jackie Blackman, 'Post-war Beckett: Resistance, Commitment or Communist Krap?', in Russell Smith (ed.), *Beckett and Ethics* (London: Continuum, 2008), p. 81.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew Gibson, *Samuel Beckett: Critical Lives* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2010), p. 74.

Gibson considers *Murphy*'s economics in more detail in an earlier essay, '*Les Économies de Murphy*' (2000). Drawing on the "New Economic Criticism", a critical movement that emerged in the late 1970s, Gibson argues that *Murphy* participates in a 'Modernist economics'.<sup>13</sup> While vehemently opposing market principles, Modernist economics engages with them sympathetically at the level of the 'textual economy' (Gibson 2000, 90). For Gibson, a textual economy is 'close to a libidinal economy' in Jean-François Lyotard's terms: 'an economy that applies [market principles]' including 'exchange-value, investment and returns, borrowing and debt' to non-economic fields (though Lyotard, like Georges Bataille, would dispute there was any such thing) (Gibson 2000, 90). Briefly, Gibson argues that *Murphy*'s libidinal economy belies the novel's superficial resistance to material economism, since Murphy's obsessive penny-pinching and fastidious temporal investments are no match for his desire for Celia, who refuses to sleep with him unless he finds a job. A parody of the thrift demanded by nineteenth-century political economists, the circuits of desire that Murphy repudiates at the level of material economics are invalidated by their counterparts in the sexual economy. The latter win out, at least temporarily, since Murphy agrees to Celia's terms before he expires in a gas explosion. Gibson interprets this as a statement that 'ultimately, the logic of Modernist economics only leads to death' (Gibson 2000, 89).

David Lloyd is the only Beckett critic to engage with economic theory as a distinct discipline, though he does so only briefly and in terms of heterodox, Marxist economics. In *Irish Culture and Colonial Modernity 1800–2000: The Transformation of Oral Space* (2010), Lloyd argues that *How It Is* makes legible the "deep structure" of historical conditions' that subtend state torture in the modern 'security state' (Lloyd 2010, 218). According to Lloyd, *How It Is* shows how legal equality and capitalist equivalence are subtended by a 'logic of substitution' that is like a torturer's indifference to the suffering individual ('what the fuck [...] does it matter who suffers')

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<sup>13</sup> Gibson, '*Les Économies de Murphy*', in Matthijs Engelberts, Joëlle Chambon and Suzanne Lafont (eds.), *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui*, Vol. 10 (2000), p. 85. My translations.

(Lloyd 2010, 212).<sup>14</sup> More specifically, the text shows the ‘ethical formalism’ of Kant’s *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), and the principle of formal equality before the law in liberal democracies, giving way to a hellish regime of economic fungibility because the desiring, needing, suffering subject (the ‘pathological subject’) has been excluded from ‘life in common’ (Lloyd 2010, 201-2). Lloyd states that the ‘model’ of economic fungibility in *How It Is* is ‘in fact’ chapter 3 of Volume 1 of Marx’s *Capital* (1867), though he is presumably not asserting a direct line of influence. Both texts proceed as if logically from a single entity to an ‘infinitely extensible’ chain of substitutions, and both texts present a ‘spare and desolate image of [the] subordination of the individual [...] to the inferno of domination and equivalence’ (Lloyd 2010, 213). In Marx, it is only the money form that is able to ‘govern’ the bad infinity of commodity exchange, because money, as ‘the universal equivalent’,

represents the moment of identity of all commodities as commodities, as exchange values rather than particular use values. But, as the instance which represents the relations among commodities as value, it takes the place of human social relations: the human individual, abstracted in the form of labour power, becomes – as money also is – one among other commodities, part of a set of intersecting series of things and objects, persons and commodities. (Lloyd 2010, 213)

Money is the identity of all commodities because it puts them into relation with one another as exchange-values. But because the relation between commodities is represented in terms of this identity, i.e. in terms of the single ratio (‘identity’) that the money form represents, human beings only figure insofar as they too are reducible to that ratio. To make all labour ‘identical’ is an abstraction in both senses of the word, because it levels the concrete particularity of the labouring subject, and because it readies this new homogenous substance – labour power – for sale, for extraction. Human beings are regarded only as abstract labour power, and the relations that might have existed between them as individual (that is to say, collective) labouring subjects is replaced by “the sublime money form” in whose abstraction as the commodity of

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<sup>14</sup> Beckett, *How It Is: A Critical-Genetic Edition*, ed. Edouard Magessa O’Reilly (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 173.

commodities all other values are symbolised' (Lloyd 2010, 213). The endless circulation of 'victims' and 'tormentors' in Parts two and three of *How It Is* is like the 'circulation of commodities' in Volume 1 of *Capital*, because they are 'reduced to the heteronomy of exchange' (Lloyd 2010, 215). But because half of them are 'the object[s] of coerced speech' (Lloyd 2010, 212), speech that is 'extorted' by means of physical violence, they are also victims of torture (*HII*, e.g. 121). The elision of torture and exchange discloses 'the brutal regime [...] that instrumentality imposes on the world' and indicates one of the ways that citizens of capitalist democracies are softened up for exchange (Lloyd 2010, 215). They are, according to Lloyd, 'pathologically determined through the imaginary relation to torture' (Lloyd 2010, 199). The liberal state, the state whose function it is to ensure dispassionate justice, is the self-same entity as the modern Western 'security state', the state whose prerogative it is to torture anyone it regards as a risk to society (Lloyd 2010, 218). The tormentor-victim relationships in *How It Is* provocatively universalises the historical fact of state-sanctioned torture during the Algerian War, when French paratroopers 'replicated [...] the tactics of the Gestapo' in their efforts to crush the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) (Lloyd 2010, 199-200). In the "deep structure" of historical conditions, fascist violence and the capitalist 'logic of substitution' are therefore connected (Lloyd 2010, 211).

Lloyd's relatively sustained engagement with Marxist political economy is important to this thesis. It is rare in Beckett Studies to find a more than fleeting mention of anything pertaining to Marx's work, and that is unusual among canonical authors. Ulrika Maude mentions Marx's observation in *Capital* that 'the human senses have a history' in connection with Beckett's use of technology in the television plays, though that is as far as she goes.<sup>15</sup> Laura Salisbury discusses the variant passage in the *Molloy* typescript in terms of Marxist concepts like 'accumulation' and 'equivalence', but she

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<sup>15</sup> Ulrika Maude, *Beckett, Technology and the Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 113.



does not mention Marx by name.<sup>16</sup> Dirk Van Hulle refers to Marx in an essay on Beckett and the chiasmus, but there is no further comparison.<sup>17</sup> There have been Marxist studies of Joyce, Proust, even Yeats, who thought Marxism was a death cult.<sup>18</sup> What makes Beckett the exception?

While this thesis is not exclusively a Marxist reading of Beckett's work, Marx is an important figure to it. It is my intention to extend Marx's critique past his historical moment and into Beckett's, drawing on economic theories that Marx did not have the opportunity to address. Since Marx's death, the most widely used and adapted definition of economics appears in Lionel Robbins's 1932 'Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science'. 'Economics', Robbins writes there, 'is the science which studies human behaviour as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses'.<sup>19</sup> This is known as the "scarcity definition". The crucial thing about this definition – that economics is not tied to productivity or materiality – cannot be explained without reference to two earlier economists, Adam Smith and Edwin Cannan (whom Robbins specifically attacks in his essay). The words "economy" and "economics" are sometimes used with challengingly little clarity or discrimination in literary theory and continental philosophy. The purpose of the following excursus, apart from to define economics, is to show that Georges Bataille's concept of the 'general economy' and its theoretical relatives are less applicable to the work of Samuel

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<sup>16</sup> Salisbury, *Samuel Beckett: Laughing Matters, Comic Timing*, p. 99-101.

<sup>17</sup> Van Hulle, 'Beckett's Principle of Reversibility: Chiasmus and the "Shape of Ideas"', *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui: Where Never Before: Beckett's Poetics of Elsewhere*, Vol. 21 (2009), p. 189.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Jeremy Hawthorn, 'Ulysses, Modernism and Marxist Criticism', in W. J. McCormack and Alistair Stead (eds.), *James Joyce and Modern Literature* (London: Routledge, 1982), pp. 112-125; Michael Sprinker, *History and Ideology in Proust: A la Recherche Du Temps Perdu and the Third French Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); and Anthony Bradley, *Imagining Ireland in the Poems and Plays of W. B. Yeats: Nation, Class, and State* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). For Yeats, Marxism is 'an instrument of destruction and persecution': 'men will die and murder for an abstract synthesis'. W. B. Yeats, *A Vision: The Revised 1937 Edition*, eds. Catherine E. Paul and Margaret Mills Harper (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Lionel Robbins, *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science* (London: Macmillan, 1932), p. 15.

Beckett than the economics I use in this thesis, despite some evident similarities between them.

The first thing to note about Robbins's definition is that he does not specify that the 'means' in question should be material ones. In fact, he is careful to distinguish his definition from the prevailing understanding, which regarded economics as 'the study of the causes of material welfare'.<sup>20</sup> This so-called "materialist" definition had held in one form or another since Adam Smith (Robbins 1932, 41). According to Smith, '[t]he great object of the Political Economy of every country is to increase the riches and power of that country' (Smith 1989, 472). Smith believed that national wealth could only be increased by what he called 'productive labour'. Labour is productive as long as it 'realises itself in some permanent subject or vendible commodity which endures after that labour is past' (Smith 1989, 430). A manufacturer's labour is productive because it 'adds, generally, to the value of the materials which he works upon, that of his own maintenance, and of his master's profit' (Smith 1989, 430). Labour is unproductive, on the other hand, if it produces nothing tangible, or if it produces something tangible that does not survive in any exchangeable form. The labour of servants and entertainers is unproductive, because it 'perishes in the very instant of its production'; but so is the labour of government, medicine, law, academia and the military (Smith 1989, 431). Smith concludes from this that nations become wealthy when they have a 'parsimonious' balance of productive and unproductive labour, while poorer nations have succumbed to 'prodigality and misconduct' in that decisive respect (Smith 1989, 444, 442). In other words, Smith defines economics as the study of national wealth in terms of the balance of productive and unproductive labour, where this obtains to 'the characteristic virtue of its inhabitants' (Smith 1989, 446).

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<sup>20</sup> Edwin Cannan, *Wealth: A Brief Explanation of the Causes of Economic Welfare*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Staples Press, 1948 [1914]), p. 5.

Later “materialist” definitions of economics have challenged Smith’s concept of productive labour, but retained his emphasis on character and wealth or “welfare”, as it magnanimously came to be known. Edwin Cannan, an early 20<sup>th</sup> century Marginalist economist, believed that the immanence of economic categories meant that any definition must be tautological: ‘economic things can best be described as economic, just as blue things can best be described as blue’ (Cannan 1948, 4). The best sub-optimal definition, however, might be “having to do with the more material side of human happiness”, or more shortly, “having to do with material welfare” (Cannan 1948, 4).

Cannan objects to Smith’s definition of productive labour because it does not take account of demand. If a worker produces a tangible material object that no one wants, it cannot be said to contribute to material welfare. If objects that are not in demand do not contribute to material welfare, then – according to this logical fallacy – objects of demand *must* contribute to material welfare, even if they are ephemeral or intangible. Their contribution to material welfare might be obscure, as in Smith’s examples from entertainment, but the labour in them should be regarded as productive, because it has nevertheless produced an object of demand that can be exchanged for material ones.<sup>21</sup>

Having brought the ephemeral and intangible within the sphere of material welfare, Cannan proposes a definition of economics on a sliding scale. At the non-economic pole, Cannan offers the Murphy-like example of ‘the satisfaction which a Tibetan fanatic feels when he has himself immured for life’. At the other pole is ‘the satisfaction of hunger’ (Cannan 1948, 3). With enough common sense, Cannan says, he is confident ‘[w]e can proceed from the undoubtedly economic at one end of the scale to the undoubtedly non-economic at the other end without finding anywhere a fence to climb

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<sup>21</sup> Cannan, *A History of the Theories of Production and Distribution in English Political Economy* (London: P. S. King & Son, 1903), pp. 18-31.

or a ditch to cross' (Cannan 1948, 4). *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) is put to work in a gruelling, twelve-page analogy to illustrate his point (Cannan 1948, 5-16).

Lionel Robbins's objection to Cannan's definition is 'crushing', as he modestly puts it (Robbins 1932, 11). In the conference proceedings of an event celebrating the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its publication, an illustrious group of economists described Robbins's 'Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science' as 'form[ing] an entirely *new* economics' that 'still lives on in contemporary textbooks'.<sup>22</sup> His move is cleverly dialectical. If there are economic and non-economic activities, he writes, individuals and societies must decide how to allocate their resources between them. We might live in a communist society, where an executive committee decides 'to spend so much labour-time on the provision of bread, so much on the provision of circuses' (Robbins 1932, 11). Or we might live in a capitalist society, where labour and commodities are priced according to demand, and individuals are supposedly left to decide for themselves how much labour-time to devote to work and leisure. But in both and every conceivable case, there must be a sum total of labour-time allocated to economic and non-economic activities. The proportion might be determined by coercion or consensus, the free market or the politburo, but society's aggregate labour-time will have been distributed one way or another. As the allocation of labour-time between economic and non-economic activities, there is no way of defining economics that is not itself subject to economics (Robbins 1932, 10-11). Economics is a meta-zero-sum game: a closed system within a closed system, modelled on the content that it itself models.

There are four main ways in which Beckett's work corresponds to Robbins's definition. First and most obviously, it is concerned with material scarcity. As we have seen, Robbins does not specify that the scarcity in question should be material, but it is a good place to start nevertheless. Beckett thought of his mature work in terms of

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<sup>22</sup> Frank Cowell and Amos Witztum (eds.), *Lionel Robbins Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science: 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference Proceedings* (London: Suntory and Toyota International Centres for Economics and Related Disciplines, 2009), p. iii.

‘impoverishment’, and the scarcity of means is a recurring motif. In the writing between 1934 and 1964, nearly all of his characters are materially poor, beginning with the ‘vagabond’ in ‘Walking Out’ (1934) and escalating with the unnamed narrator of ‘The End’ (1946), whose economic position entails ‘the absolute impossibility of all purchase’.<sup>23</sup> This could apply to Molloy and, later on, Moran; to Malone and his puppets; to the Unnamable and his surrogates; to Vladimir and Estragon; to Hamm, Clov, Nagg and Nell; and to the creatures of *How It Is*. It also applies partially to Murphy, who is destitute for most of his novel, and to Watt, who appears to be an itinerant domestic servant.

Scarcity is not just on the side of ‘purchase’, however. Beckett’s worlds are generally lacking in material resources, and what is left is often running out. Murphy loses his only source of income when he is forced to move out of his tenement housing, which is being demolished. Molloy and Malone still have a handful of ‘goods and possessions’, though they don’t expect to add to their ‘inventor[ies]’; they are keen to ‘draw the line and make the tot’ in fact, an accounting metaphor for ceasing to be (*Mu*, 3; *Mo*, 10).<sup>24</sup> The Unnamable seems to exist prior to ‘things’ and questions whether they are ‘necessary’; he is surprised when Malone turns up in a hat, which he describes as ‘the first thing’, though others appear later.<sup>25</sup> Everything seems to have run out in *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*; in the latter, there are ‘no more’ ‘bicycle-wheels’, ‘pap’, ‘speech’, ‘sugar plums’, ‘tide’, ‘navigators’, ‘rugs’, ‘pain-killers’, ‘coffins’, even ‘nature’ (*En*, 96, 116, 122, 124, 125, 127, 130, 97). Only four things are left in *How It Is* – jute sacks, cords, assorted tins of fish and tin-openers – and they turn out to be redundant anyway. As early as February 1952, Beckett understood his work as a ‘journey,

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<sup>23</sup> James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), p. 352. Beckett, ‘Walking Out’, in *More Pricks Than Kicks*, ed. Cassandra Nelson (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), p. 97. Beckett, ‘The Expelled’, in *The Complete Short Prose*, p. 49.

<sup>24</sup> Beckett, *Malone Dies in Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies and The Unnamable* (New York: Grove Press, 2009), p. 175.

<sup>25</sup> Beckett, *The Unnamable*, in *Three Novels*, p. 287.

irreversible, in gathering thinglessness'.<sup>26</sup> This trajectory is borne out by the increasing scarcity of material goods.

Second, Beckett is concerned with the *form* of scarcity. Economics, writes Robbins, 'does not attempt to pick out certain *kinds* of behaviour, but focuses attention on a particular *aspect* of behaviour, the form imposed by the influence of scarcity' (Robbins 1932, 16). In Beckett's work, this is probably most evident at the level of interpretation; it is notoriously difficult for readers to extract the hermeneutic goods from Beckett's writing. The experience of this deprivation – of a 'world' and its referents, or of any stable, paraphrasable content – is what it is like reading Beckett, according to Wolfgang Iser:

the negativeness of these texts would seem to consist in the fact that they refuse to satisfy our elementary needs, and that whenever we think we have found something definite to satisfy our needs, we are made to realise that what we have found is only a fiction<sup>27</sup>

The form of Beckett's writing, particularly its structures of equivalence and proportion of referents and displacements, is carefully calculated to produce this experience of deprivation. In terms of referentiality, that ratio is calculated to block formalist readings (especially allegory) *and* realist ones. This is discussed in chapters 2 and 4, as well as later in the introduction. In terms of equivalence, every identity levels the semantic surface like *Molloy's* 'blacken[ed] margins', the 'holes of words' filled in 'till all is blank and flat and the whole ghastly business looks like what it is, senseless, speechless, issueless misery' (*Mo*, 9). Other examples of this would be *The Unnamable's* 'affirmations and negations invalidated as uttered'; the logic of substitution that determines the world of *How It Is*; the structural necessity of

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<sup>26</sup> Beckett, *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Vol. 2, 1941-1956*, eds. George Craig, Martha Dow Fehsenfeld, Dan Gunn and Lois More Overbeck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 319.

<sup>27</sup> Wolfgang Iser, *On Beckett: Essays and Criticism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Anthem Press, 2012), pp. 37-8.

equilibrium in Knott's household in *Watt*; and the 'contrapuntal opposites that undo themselves' in Beckett's drama (*Un*, 285).<sup>28</sup>

Third, Beckett and Robbins are concerned with choice. We are all communists when means are not scarce. Air, for example, is unlikely ever to be incorporated in the price system. Nor is any problem likely to arise when there are a variety of ends, providing 'I have ample time and ample means with which to do them' (Robbins 1932, 13). The problem arises, Robbins says, when 'behaviour necessarily assumes the form of choice':

Here we are, sentient creatures with bundles of desires and aspirations, with masses of instinctive tendencies all urging us in different ways to action. But the time in which these tendencies can be expressed is limited. The external world does not offer full opportunities for their complete achievement. Life is short. Nature is niggardly. Our fellows have other objectives. [...] We have been turned out of Paradise. We have neither eternal life nor unlimited means of gratification. Everywhere we turn, if we choose one thing we must relinquish others which, in different circumstances, we would wish not to have relinquished. Scarcity of means to satisfy ends of varying importance is an almost ubiquitous condition of human behaviour. (Robbins 1932, 13)

This is a startlingly emotive piece of writing to discover in an economic tract from the 1930s. It also sounds remarkably like a passage from Volume 1 of Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Presentation* (1818), though in a rather different key:

All *willing* arises from want; therefore from deficiency, and therefore from suffering. The satisfaction of a wish ends it; yet for one wish that is satisfied there remain at least ten which are denied. Further, the desire lasts long, the demands are infinite: the satisfaction is short and scantily measured out. But even the final satisfaction is itself only apparent; every satisfied wish at once makes room for a new one: both are illusions; the one is known to be so, the other not yet. No attained object of desire can give lasting satisfaction, but merely a fleeting gratification: it is like the alms thrown to the beggar, that keeps him alive to-day that his misery may be prolonged till the morrow.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Beckett, *Watt*, ed. C. J. Ackerley (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), p. 111. Andrea Oppo, *Philosophical Aesthetics and Samuel Beckett* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008), p. 161.

<sup>29</sup> Richard E. Aquila's translation of Schopenhauer has been preferred, with one exception, to R. B. Haldane's, E. F. J. Payne's or Christopher Janaway's et. al. This is because it renders "*Vorstellung*" as 'presentation' rather than 'representation', a term that this thesis uses in its aesthetic sense, to denote to mimetic artworks. (Haldane's 'idea' is confusingly metaphysical). "Presentation" also faintly suggests a 'theatrical presentation', as Aquila notes; 'Schopenhauer in fact calls the side of the world that he calls *meine Vorstellung* a *Schauspiel*, or a "show" (or "play")': a show that is "mine" in the sense that I am its spectator'. It can also refer to 'the process or action of presenting', so that 'we may say that *Hamlet* is "our" presentation for the evening'.

Both describe ‘a world of constantly needy creatures’ in competition with each other and chronically deprived by the structure of desire and the finitude of resources.<sup>30</sup> Both see the human being as a helpless passenger in a body with conflicting impulses. And both understand that ‘for one wish that is fulfilled there remain at least ten that are denied’. Robbins’s definition, then, is as much about choice and conflict as it is about scarce means with alternative uses. Robbins’s postlapsarian economics is very close to Schopenhauer’s, and their similarities contribute to Beckett’s interest in an economics of scarcity, competition and choice.

One last example shows the affinity between Robbins’s and Beckett’s economic subjects. Testing his definition with a particularly challenging predicament, Robbins evokes a favourite image of Beckett’s:

If the economic subject has two ends and one means of satisfying them, and the two ends are of equal importance, his position will be like the position of the ass in the fable, paralysed halfway between the two equally attractive bundles of hay. (Robbins 1932, 13-14)

Robbins is referring to Buridan’s Ass, a thought-experiment used in economics and proto-economics since Aristotle, though it did not become central to mainstream economic theory until the early 1870s. Beckett first mentions Buridan’s Ass in ‘A Wet Night’ (1934), when Belacqua cannot fathom a reason to prefer one direction of movement over another.<sup>31</sup> Andrew Gibson comments that Belacqua has no ‘foundation’ for choice, partly because of cultural deracination; but he also notes that his indifference participates in a ‘long-established Irish tradition of allegorising women’ (Gibson 2010, 39). Should Belacqua go home with the Alba after the Christmas party, and defile his immaculate conception of her? Or should he go back to the party and the

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Beckett would approve of the thought that the world is a theatrical presentation in which we are both the players and the audiences, as the collapse of *percipi/percipere* in *Film* (1965) suggests. So would Marx, as the conclusion discusses. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, Vol. I, 7<sup>th</sup> ed., trans. R. B. Haldane and J. Kemp (London: Kegan Paul, 1909), p. 253-4.

<sup>30</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Presentation*, Vol 1, trans. Richard E. Aquila (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 389.

<sup>31</sup> Beckett, ‘A Wet Night’, in *More Pricks Than Kicks*, p. 33.



Frica, a pre-defiled receptacle, or ‘private convenience’, as Beckett abhorrently puts it in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (1992) [1932]?<sup>32</sup> Belacqua’s indifference makes ‘[a]ll Belacqua’s women in some sense equivalent’, writes Gibson; and this remark is helpful to understand Beckett’s understanding of choice in general (Gibson 2010, 40). According to neoclassical economics, *all* decisions are made at “indifference points”; that is, moments where one choice and another have equivalent subjective utility. On this downward curve of desire, Belacqua chooses the Alba when the Frisca’s utility to him has declined to the point she is indifferently exchangeable for her. For modern economics, every decision takes the form of Buridan’s Ass, and every exchange takes place at these moments of equivalence. Beckett’s economic subject is in this sense identical to the economic subject of Robbins and his neoclassical descendants. Beckett’s writing behaves as a critique of this subject insofar as it tests limits, as it does in all of the four main texts I discuss.

It does this initially through Schopenhauer and his ironic reversals of suffering and satisfaction (*Murphy*), which generally seem to show that the economic subject is inexorable. Desire and value are inescapably positive in valency, which means they constitute a ‘closed system’ (*Mu*, 38). Value can’t go anywhere in a closed system because valuelessness can’t be valued without reverting to value, so desire gets displaced from one object to the next in an indifferent series of exchanges (*Mu*, 38). There are glimmers of negativity in destructiveness (‘the will dust in the dust of its object’) and illogicity (‘nothing to lose, therefore nothing to gain’), but otherwise *Murphy*’s subject is emphatically economic (*Mu*, 67. 142). Later on, Beckett applies the logic of the economic subject to other domains: semantic economies of scarce or overdetermined referents, intrapsychic economies of love and hatred, and intersubjective economies that resemble sadomasochism (*Molloy* and *How It Is*). These

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<sup>32</sup> Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, ed. Eoin O’Brien and Edith Fournier (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1990), p. 101.

are the most difficult to define and justify as “economic” in Robbins’s sense, and the closest to Bataille’s work and that of other theorists outside economics departments.

Bataille’s concept of the ‘general economy’ in *The Accursed Share* (1947-1949) concerns ‘the play of living matter in general’, rather than ‘restrict[ing] its objects to operations carried out with a view to a limited end, that of economic man’.<sup>33</sup> Bataille rejects political economy – ‘restricted economy’ – for several reasons. His first objection is based on the view that ‘economic science’ is exclusively concerned with ‘particular operations with limited ends’ (Bataille 1991, 22). This is a truncated and misleading characterisation of Robbins’s definition of economics as ‘the science which studies human behaviour as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses’ (Robbins 1932, 15).

The ‘operations’ that Bataille identifies as distinctive of the general economy are war, ‘the [surplus] energy resources’ of animals, plants, meat-eating, violence, non-reproductive sex and death. The ultimate ‘source of life’s exuberant development’ is the sun, because ‘it dispenses energy – wealth – without any return’ (Bataille 1991, 36, 38, 55, 35). This makes it the model, as well as the origin, of all ‘excess energy’ and ‘nonproductive expenditure’, but it also clashes with human finitude, which responds by anxiously inventing boundaries to transgress (Bataille 1991, 10, 12). Nick Land summarises Bataille’s view as follows:

The solar source of all terrestrial resources commits them to an abysmal generosity, which Bataille calls ‘glory’ [...] When the silting-up of energy upon the surface of the planet is interpreted by its complex consequences as rigid utility, a productivist civilisation is initiated, whose culture involves a history of ontology, and a moral order. Systematic limits to growth require that the inevitable re-commencement of the solar trajectory scorches jagged perforations through such civilisations [...] Predominant amongst the incendiary and epidemic gashes which contravene the interests of mankind are eroticism, base religion, inutile criminality, and war.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy, Volume I: Consumption*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1991), p. 23.

<sup>34</sup> Nick Land, *The Thirst for Annihilation: Georges Bataille and Virulent Nihilism* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 45-6.

Emphasising Bataille's rejection of 'productivist' economics and its consequences for the 'history of ontology' and 'moral order', Land considers the parameters of the 'restricted economy' as 'constructs' that are paradoxically 'the *effects* of limitless solar energy' (Land 1992, 45). As Rebecca Roberts-Hughes puts it, the 'erotic, sacrificial, transgressive excess' that human beings are drawn to – whether they are 'the [economic] value of utility or the taboo around sexual acts' – are 'an attempt to control the sun's proliferating excess of energy': the energy that is 'continually emerging from the sun and constantly threatening to overwhelm the boundary and that which it defines, humanity'.<sup>35</sup>

There are numerous 'operations' that Bataille excludes from the 'restricted economy' that have, in fact, been considered by economists. For example, Bataille explains World War One as 'a catastrophic expenditure of excess energy' brought about by 'soaring industrial growth' in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Bataille 1991, 23). He regards this 'excess of energy' as 'beyond the too narrow scope of the economy' because the 'industrial plethora' that occasioned it was 'intensifi[ed]' rather than 'dissipate[d]', as restricted economics ought to predict (Bataille 1991, 25). However, this extra-economic intensification was well understood by economists and politicians alike. In *The World Crisis: 1918-1928* (1931), Winston Churchill (of all radical philosophers) describes how, during World War One, '[t]he intensity of the exertions evoked by the national danger far exceeded the ordinary capacity for human beings. All were geared up to abnormal pitch'.<sup>36</sup> When the war ended, the British government had on their hands several 'enormous programmes of production', involving five million munitions workers who no longer had any purposeful employment. Bataille would have approved of Churchill's solution:

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<sup>35</sup> Rebecca Robert-Hughes, 'Transgression and Conservation: Rereading Georges Bataille', *Journal for Cultural Research*, 21:2 (2016), p. 163.

<sup>36</sup> Winston Churchill, *The World Crisis: 1918-1928* (New York: Charles Cribner's Sons, 1931), p. 19.

for many weeks after the war was over we continued to disgorge upon the gaping world masses of artillery and military material materials of every kind. It was certainly a waste, but perhaps it was a prudent waste. (Churchill 1931, 21)

John Maynard Keynes makes a similar point in his 1935 'Lecture On Income'. 'War', he says, 'has been the only means of really improving employment that is respectable', i.e. effective.<sup>37</sup> Keynes felt that the First World War had been caused by 'chronic or intermittent under-employment', which led to the 'competitive struggle for markets' among rival nations:

if nations can learn to provide themselves with full employment by their domestic policy (and, we must add, if they can also attain equilibrium in the trend of their population), there need be no important economic forces calculated to set the interest of one country against that of its neighbours.<sup>38</sup>

In the absence of a 'system of domestic *laissez-faire* and an international gold standard', Keynes writes in *The General Theory of Money, Interest and Employment* (1936), there is no way of 'mitigating economic distress' except protectionism, economic nationalism and, eventually, war (Keynes 2015, 382). In Bataille's terms, '[i]f exportation is difficult, and if no other outlet is open, only war can be the client of a plethoric industry' (Bataille 1991, 171). If pressed to use Bataille's vocabulary, Keynes would say that war was 'surplus energy' burned off in the form of human 'sacrifice' on a 'superabundant' scale, to reduce unemployment and maintain domestic economic stability (Bataille 1991, 29). Bataille never mentions unemployment, which is a serious shortcoming in his theory; but he does acknowledge that wars 'coincide with an appreciable rise in the general standard of living: the majority of the population benefits from more and more unproductive services; [...] and wages are increased overall' (Bataille 1991, 37).

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<sup>37</sup> John Maynard Keynes, 'Lecture on Income, 21 October 1935', in Thomas K. Rymes (ed.) *Keynes's Lectures, 1923-35: Notes of a Representative Student* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), p. 162.

<sup>38</sup> Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, in Elizabeth Johnson (ed.), *The Collected Writings of John Maynard Keynes, VII* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 382-3.

Keynes also addresses Bataille's interest in the relationship between limitless energy and violence or transgressive excess. In the *General Theory*, Keynes writes that the capitalist should be encouraged to 'tyrannise over his bank balance' rather than his 'fellow citizens' (Keynes 2015, 374). Unlike the sun's infinite energy, which human beings paradoxically 'attempt to control' by transgressing boundaries, the idea of infinite accumulation is a form of limitlessness that, however illusory, appears within the reach of the capitalist. Anticipating Bataille's logic precisely, but without having to redefine economics or resort to astronomy, Keynes suggests that the supposed limitlessness of capitalist accumulation – the 'sublime [of] the capitalist economy', as Jean-François Lyotard would put it – means that 'dangerous human proclivities' can be 'canalised into comparatively harmless channels' (Keynes 2015, 374).<sup>39</sup>

Finally, 'scientific economics' had accomplished Bataille's 'Copernican transformation' of economics eighty years before the publication of *The Accursed*

*Share:*

the book I was writing (which I am now publishing) did not consider the facts the way qualified economists do, that I had a point of view from which a human sacrifice, the construction of a church or the gift of a jewel were no less interesting than the sale of wheat. In short, I had to try in vain to make clear the notion of a "general economy" in which the "expenditure" (the "consumption") of wealth, rather than the production, was the primary object. (Bataille 1991, 9)

At the start of the 1870s, a consumer theory of value called "Marginalism" appeared simultaneously in England, Austria and Switzerland. Described as 'a watershed moment in the history of economic thought', Marginalism was a radical departure from the labour theory of value, which had been ubiquitous since Adam Smith and the emergence of economics as an independent discipline.<sup>40</sup> Smith and his most prominent successors, David Ricardo and Karl Marx, saw the value of a commodity in terms of the

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<sup>39</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), p. 105.

<sup>40</sup> Ben Fine and Dimitri Milonakis, *From Political Economy to Economics: Method, the Social and the Historical in the Evolution of Economic Theory* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 12.

labour embodied in it.<sup>41</sup> From that point in common, they developed different systems to explain what Marx called ‘the laws of motion’ of the capitalist economy, each retaining the emphasis on labour and production (Marx 1990, 92). Marginalism, by extreme contrast, focused exclusively on consumption, modelling every aspect of the economy on consumer decision-making. As Regenia Gagnier puts it in *The Insatiability of Human Wants: Economics and Aesthetics in Market Society* (2000), ‘[v]alue no longer inhered in goods themselves – whether the goods were grain or human labour – but in others’ demands for the goods’.<sup>42</sup> Scarcity ceased to be a problem of production and instead became a problem of consumption. ‘Modern man’, Gagnier concludes, ‘would henceforth be known by the insatiability of his desires’ (Gagnier 2000, 4).

Bataille has exactly the same revelation in ‘The Notion of Expenditure’ (1933).

Steward Kendall calls this his ‘single most significant essay’, writing that it

inverts the classical – and hence also the Marxist – economic model by insisting that consumption rather than production determines the nature and goals of culture. In short, societies can and should be measured and understood based on the way they consume resources rather than on relations of production.<sup>43</sup>

Like Marginalism and its neoclassical descendants, consumption is the focus of Bataille’s economic theory and, a fortiori, the purported material basis of the economy. Both Bataille and Marginalism overturn ‘a traditional economics based on the principle of scarcity’, as Michael Richardson puts it, and both theories posit ‘insatiability’ as the limitless motive force of economic life, whether of ‘human wants’ or ‘solar radiation’

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<sup>41</sup> Smith: ‘the labour of the manufacturer fixes and realizes itself in some particular subject or vendible commodity [...]. It is, as it were, a certain quantity of labour stocked and stored up to be employed, if necessary, upon some other occasion’. Ricardo: ‘[t]he value of a commodity, or the quantity of any other commodity for which it will exchange, depends on the relative quantity of labour which is necessary for its production’. Marx: ‘[t]he value of a commodity represents human labour pure and simple’. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of The Wealth of Nations, Books I-III*, ed. Andrew Skinner (London: Penguin Classics, 1989), p. 430. David Ricardo, *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*, in *The Works and Correspondence of David Ricardo, Vol. I*, ed. P. Sraffa, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 11. Karl Marx, *Capital Vol. I*, ed. Ernst Mandel, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 135.

<sup>42</sup> Regenia Gagnier, *The Insatiability of Human Wants: Economics and Aesthetics in Market Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 94.

<sup>43</sup> Stewart Kendall, *Georges Bataille: Critical Lives* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2007), pp. 94-5.

(Bataille 1991, 29).<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, although Marginalism does not dispute ‘the assumption that man makes rational decisions on the basis of the calculation of personal interest’, its definition of “rational” is not objective and its calculation of personal interest is post-hoc, so whatever decision I make I *will have made* rationally on the basis of a calculation of personal interest. This also conforms to Bataille. To take two examples his general economy, I could give away a precious jewel or participate in human sacrifice and remain a “rational economic actor”, in Marginalist and neoclassical terms, providing I had reached the decision through a process of subjective reasoning that took account of what I considered to be my personal interest (Bataille 1991, 9).

Bataille also says that he rejects political economy because ‘economic phenomena are not easy to isolate, and their general coordination is not easy to establish’ (Bataille 1991, 20). He is not wrong; but it is clear from this brief comparison that economists can and do isolate and coordinate the economic phenomena he is interested in. While claiming to ‘overturn’ restricted ‘classical’ or ‘scientific’ economists, Bataille hardly mentions them and does not engage with their theories at all, beyond stating (wrongly) that production is their primary concern (Bataille 1991, 10). As Michael Richardson writes:

Bataille was not an economist and makes no claim to being so. His understanding of economic theory remained limited and he made no attempt to place his argument within the terms of any pre-existing economic argument. This is of little consequence in so far as he could be said to be throwing down a challenge to all economic thinking and his analysis is directed toward the overthrow of economic principles considered in isolation (Richardson 1994, 70)

Part of what Theodor Adorno admired about Beckett’s work was its inescapability. The characters in *Endgame* are ‘imprisoned’ from nature and ‘imprisoned [by] individuation’.<sup>45</sup> The ‘subject’s liquidation’ is the only ‘escape route’ in *The Unnamable*

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<sup>44</sup> Michael Richardson, *Georges Bataille* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 72.

<sup>45</sup> Adorno, ‘Trying to Understand *Endgame*’, trans. Michael T. Jones, *New German Critique*, No. 2, Critical Theory and Modernity (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1982), p. 123, 127.

(1953). In *Negative Dialectics* (1973) [1966], Adorno goes as far as to say that Beckett's work is 'like a concentration camp'.<sup>46</sup> 'Absolute, the world becomes a hell', Adorno writes in 'Trying to Understand *Endgame*' (1982) [1959]; and no meaningful critique can be made from outside of it, because 'there is nothing else' (Adorno 1982, 149). 'Outside of here it's death', Hamm's reiterated assertion in *Endgame*, would be hopeful if an outside were conceivable.<sup>47</sup> 'Imagination Dead Imagine' knows that it is not, since '[n]o, life ends and no, there is nothing elsewhere'.<sup>48</sup> Only death can begin to suggest what 'outside' or 'elsewhere' might mean, but even death has its limits.

In the Preface to *The German Ideology* (1846), Marx and Engels tell the story of a 'valiant fellow [who] had the idea that men were drowned in water only because they were possessed with the idea of gravity'.<sup>49</sup> If this brave philosopher could only demystify the idea of drowning, water would become as harmless as air. Bataille goes a step further than him. He seems to think that by completely overlooking even the basic premises of bourgeois political economy, society might be cured of scarcity-thinking and everything that follows from it: self-interest, accumulation, efficiency, the elimination of waste, and so on. Rather than ignoring them wholesale, this thesis places its argument within the terms of pre-existing economic theory, on the basis that it is impossible to critique a problem before understanding it.

Despite Robbins's insistence that economic phenomena need not be material in nature, his "restricted" definition may seem to clash with my more "general" application of economics to describe psychoanalytic concepts and aesthetic effects. In the first place, that application is based on the conviction that economics in a material sense shapes those domains almost to the point of determination. But it means

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<sup>46</sup> Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1973), p. 380.

<sup>47</sup> Beckett, *Endgame*, in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Dramatic Works*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 2006), p. 96, 126.

<sup>48</sup> Beckett, 'Imagination Dead Imagine', in Gontarski (ed.), *The Complete Short Prose*, p. 185.

<sup>49</sup> Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, trans. C. J. Arthur (New York: International Publishers, 2004), p. 37.



something different to describe them as economies themselves, rather in terms of economic determination.

The first point, of course, belongs to a Marxist tradition that regards ‘the economic structure of society’, and especially the ‘mode of production’, as the prime mover of ‘social existence’.<sup>50</sup> Neoclassical theory shares the view that economics fundamentally shapes human behaviour, though it places its emphasis on consumption rather than production, as I have already mentioned. Here is how Marx famously delineates the relationship between economics and social existence in the *Grundrisse* (1861):

The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness. (Marx 1986, 263)

Marx believed that the mode of production of material life determines social existence and, from there, individual consciousness. This is because the division of labour gives rise to a class system based on the ownership of capital. Individuals who do not have access to capital are obliged to sell their labour to those who do, since the latter own the means of production. The mode of production determines the interests of each class, and conditions their social and political life through those interests.

Some later Marxists and Marxian sociologists have suggested that, towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the mode of consumption began to play a part in conditioning the general process of social, political and intellectual life, too. This is partly because class identity came to be organised around consumption as well as production, as Max Weber and Thorsten Veblen were early to notice, and as Pierre Bourdieu has exhaustively shown.<sup>51</sup> It was also because some forms of consumption, especially

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<sup>50</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, in *Collected Works Vol 28, 1857-1861*, trans. Ernest Wangermann (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986), p. 263

<sup>51</sup> See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the “Spirit” of Capitalism*, ed. and trans. Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells (London: Penguin Books, 2002); Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (New York: Dover Publications); and Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice

aesthetic consumption, might be inherently stupefying, helping to obscure the mode of production, as Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno have argued, among many others.<sup>52</sup>

This is where it becomes possible to describe individual consciousness and aesthetic experience as economies, rather than merely determined by economics. Firstly, this thesis works on the hunch that psychoanalysis might mirror or even partly constitute modern economic consciousness, given the structural similarities between Marginalism and psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis also makes extensive use of economic language, suggesting some affinity between the two disciplines, though the causative direction is anyone's guess. Psychoanalysis emerged at the same time as Marginalism became a part of mainstream economics, both perhaps as responses to a change in general consumption habits. The burgeoning of finance had made credit more available, and production-line technology enabled mass production of consumer goods. Simply put, people had more money and more things to spend it on. Work became less all-consuming and consuming became more significant to more people's lives. If more emphasis on subjective wants entails more attention to subjective experience, then consumption and psychoanalytic introspection surely go hand in hand (Gagnier 2000, 1-4). This is difficult to prove, however, so Lawrence Birken approaches the question from the perspective of intellectual history. In 'Freud's "Economic Hypothesis": From Homo Oeconomicus to Homo Sexualis', Birken shows that Freud himself repeatedly described his psychology as 'economic' in nature. Although there is little to no evidence that Freud (like Beckett) ever read any recent or contemporary economic theory, Freud drew on the same intellectual sources as political economy, from Newtonian physics

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(Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press, 1984). Bourdieu's analysis is discussed more fully in a moment.

<sup>52</sup> E.g. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J. M. Bernstein, trans. Rolf Tiedmann (London: Routledge, 2001). Slavoj Žižek and Fredric Jameson are the most prominent contemporary critical theorists to practice what they might call "ideology critique". Adorno is an important and recurring figure in this thesis, and I return to him later in the introduction.

and thermodynamics, to evolutionary biology and natural philosophy, to theological and Pre-Socratic conceptions of providential harmony.<sup>53</sup> There are many productive phylogenetic comparisons to be made between the two disciplines, as I discuss at the beginning of chapter 1, where I show that Beckett drew on the same sources.

An “economics” of representation is trickier to posit using my theoretical framework. The “New Economic Criticism”, a small but energetic field of literary studies that emerged in the late 1970s, presented two ways of approaching it, though I have decided to use neither. The first one, defined by Kurt Heinzelman, concerned ‘the way in which economic systems are structured, by means of the imagination, upon what are essentially fictive concepts’.<sup>54</sup> His implicit claim is that economic systems ought to be available for literary study because they rely on literary concepts. Marc Shell offers a subtler approach. This one cautiously suggests that ‘literary works are composed of small tropic exchanges or metaphors, some of which can be analysed in terms of signified economic content and all of which can be analysed in terms of economic form’.<sup>55</sup> Shell wants to say that literary texts are normally composed of tropes and devices with economic parallels, and that some of these tropes and devices actually contain economic content that can be interpreted in terms of material economics (rather than economic theory). The aim of his approach is ‘to understand the relation between such literary exchanges and the exchanges that constitute the political economy’ (Shell 1993, 7). In other words, Shell hopes to ascertain the nature of the relationship between explicit economic content and economic content secreted in tropes and literary devices. Then he wants to understand the relationship between this economic content and material economics (as well, perhaps, as economic theory).

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<sup>53</sup> Lawrence Birken, ‘Freud’s “Economic Hypothesis”: From Homo Oeconomicus to Homo Sexualis’, *American Imago*, Vol. 56, No. 4, Winter 1999, pp. 311-330.

<sup>54</sup> Kurt Heinzelman, *The Economics of the Imagination* (Amhurst, Ma: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), p. 11-12.

<sup>55</sup> Marc Shell, *The Economy of Literature* (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. 7.

My thesis does not address these problems and does not employ their methodologies. I am strictly concerned with an economics of representation that involves no more than the relationship between scarce means and alternative uses. This is not the same as invoking similarities or analogies or even homologies between economic concepts and literary techniques. Nor do I believe that it is true or useful to believe that most economic systems are essentially fictive concepts or literary devices. As I state at the beginning of chapter 2, I do not believe there is any inner connection between the theme of equilibrium in *Watt* and its formal manifestations in comedy or representation. Beckett includes rare, obscure referents to World War Two in *Watt* and *Molloy* because their scarcity is inversely proportionate to the horror of their content. A different ratio would produce a different aesthetic effect. If the referents were more abundant, as they are in the third *Molloy* notebook [1948], it would throw out this semantic economy. The meaning diminishes as the quantity of referents increases. This, in Robbins's strict sense, is an economic phenomenon (rather than a similarity, an analogy, a homology etc.).

The same economic model can be applied to comedy. Freud conceives of comedy as a way of saving psychic energy, as I also discuss briefly in chapter 2. With a certain kind of comedy, his account can be helpfully restated in terms of form and content. Something might be funny when there is a surplus of form over content. The effort of telling a joke with an indifferent punchline is funny because wastefulness feels like thrift to the joke-hearer, because of our expectation that resources are finite. If the joke-teller has wasted their energy on an indifferent punchline, I must have benefitted from their loss, which is sadistically funny.

Robbins's definition can also be applied to textual effects in general. When Watt enumerates the possible positions of furniture in Mr Knott's room, it might be funny in something like Freud's inverted sense, but it is also exhausting and pitiable. We may therefore be enjoying a form of aesthetic sadism, again on the grounds that Watt's loss

must be our gain, because of the economic principle that scarce ends have alternative uses. Watt's end is our use. We assume that we must be profiting from his labour, or from the labour of Beckett composing the text. But the affect is more complex than mere humour, comprising (for me) pathos, uneasiness, confusion, frustration and even anger, affects which I discuss in chapter 3.

There is one exception to the 'restricted' use of economic theory in this thesis. In my conclusion, 'The Radiant Measure', the discussion of Marx's origin of the universal equivalent does employ something like the method of the New Economic Criticism, but that is because Marx does as well. Marx's story of the encounter of commodities in their relative and equivalent forms of value uses fictive and tropological concepts to explain economic categories, as part of a satire intended, I think, to identify commodity exchange with the relationship between commodity owners *as* commodities. Marx's language in *Capital* is gendered and disparaging, as Luce Irigaray points out in *This Sex which is Not One* (1977), where she argues that 'Marx's analysis of commodities as the elementary form of capitalist wealth can thus be understood as an interpretation of the status of woman in so-called patriarchal societies'.<sup>56</sup> Irigaray closely follows Marx's analysis of the commodity, giving numerous examples of analogies or homologies between the commodity and the status of women.<sup>57</sup> If, as Marx says, commodities have started behaving like human beings and human beings like commodities, it would make sense to see them encountering one another in the proprietorial way G. W. F. Hegel describes in his chapter on 'Self-Consciousness' in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1808), which I discuss in the Postscript. Reintroducing gender to Hegel's strangely neutered account, it is difficult to resist Irigaray's conclusion that Marx's rhetoric has a gendered subtext, intentionally or not: namely that 'commodities, women, are a mirror

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<sup>56</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex which is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 172.

<sup>57</sup> Irigaray notes the especially striking example of Marx's aside about Shakespeare's Mistress Quickly, who differs from 'the reality of the value of commodities' in that 'we don't know "where to have her"' (Irigaray 1985, 175).

of value of and for man' (Irigaray 1985, 177). This is a 'tropic exchange' with a real material outcome. The personification of commodities does not just entail the reification of individuals; it specifically entails the reification of women. As I argue in chapter 4, the violent encounters of *How It Is* play out this predicament, complete with obfuscatory re-gendering.

Despite Beckett's interest in scarcity and choice, it still may not feel intuitive to regard his unworldly, quietist writing in terms of economic theory, let alone committed Marxism. It might therefore be worthwhile to begin by testing the relevance of economics on the two phrases Beckett himself recommended as 'points of departure' for the 'unenviable' student of his work.<sup>58</sup> The first phrase is attributed to Democritus of Abdera, and Beckett probably encountered it in Archibald Alexander's *Short History of Philosophy* (1922): '[n]othing is more real than nothing'.<sup>59</sup> The second is from Arnold Geulincx's *Ethica* (1675): '*ubi nihil vales, ibi nihil velis*', or '[n]othing to lose, [...] [t]herefore nothing to gain', as Celia translates it in *Murphy* (1938) (*Mu*, 142).<sup>60</sup> They are related, to begin with, through their double-use of the word "nothing". There have been several translations of this phrase, as David Tucker enumerates in *Samuel Beckett and Arnold Geulincx: Tracing 'a Literary Fantasia'* (2012).<sup>61</sup> Martin Wilson, a translator of the Geulincx, opts for '[w]herein you have no power, therein you should not will', a logically consistent formulation that loses the two contradictory senses of '*vales*', "worth" and will" (Geulincx 1999, 44). Anthony Uhlmann prefers '[w]here one is

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<sup>58</sup> Beckett gave this instruction twice, once in 1962 to Lawrence E. Harvey, and once in 1967 to Siegel Kennedy. Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), pp. 267-8. Beckett, 'Letter to Siegel Kennedy, 14 June 1967', in *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment* (New York: Grove Press, 1983), p. 113.

<sup>59</sup> The apothegm appears in this form in *Malone Dies* (*Ma*, 186). It appears in *Murphy* (1938) as '[n]ought is more real than nothing'. Shane Weller notes that the phrasing is similar in *Murphy* and Alexander's *Short History*, which Beckett read in 1932, and argues that this was the likely source. Beckett, *Murphy*, p. 154. Weller, *Beckett, Literature and the Ethics of Alterity* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 70-1. Alexander, *Short History of Philosophy*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Glasgow: Maclehose, Jackson and Co., 1922), p. 38-9.

<sup>60</sup> Arnold Geulincx, *Metaphysics Vera*, trans. Martin Wilson (Wisbech: Christoffel Press, 1999), p. 44.

<sup>61</sup> David Tucker, *Beckett and Geulincx: Tracing 'a Literary Fantasia'* (London: Continuum, 2012), p. 18-9.

worth nothing one should want nothing’, suggesting an inner link between subjects and objects without value, a proposition that comes unfortunately close to meaning “know your place”.<sup>62</sup> Chris Ackerley uses the same structure as Ullmann, though he adds a ‘there’ and changes ‘one’ to ‘you’, giving the phrase a more Beckett-like chiasmic balance: ‘where you are worth nothing, there you should want nothing’.<sup>63</sup> This also suggests that ‘you’ might occupy several positions, only one of which is worthless. Tucker himself follows Wilson on the basis that it is more ‘metaphysical’ than ‘ethical’ in its ‘emphasis’ (Tucker 2012, 18-9). I have chosen Beckett’s own translation, partly because it is from the horse leech’s mouth, and partly because it is maximally paradoxical, as we will see.

Democritus’s first ‘nothing’ seems to be part of a superlative construction, “X is more Y than Z”, which is familiar from the hyperbole of advertising. ‘Nothing acts faster than Anadin’ is one unfortunate example, mistaking Democritus’s first kind of nothing, a non-existent point of comparison, for his second kind of nothing, a materially existing alternative to Anadin (anodyne?). ‘There’s nothing so refreshing under the sun as delicious Coca-Cola’ narrowly avoids this error, and ends up being a brilliant example of abstraction in language, as well as an echo of *Murphy* and *Ecclesiastes*.<sup>64</sup>

Because of its place at the head of the sentence, this first ‘nothing’ lacks a negative particle more naturally than the second nothing. This makes us more likely to take it at face value, as an intensifier for whatever is coming next. It is saying, “The thing that this nothing is not exists absolutely, because it does not”. The second kind of nothing, being at the end of the sentence where subjects belong, seems to be that counterpart. It might be a nothing that concretely exists, like the vacuum of space, or it might be a

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<sup>62</sup> Han van Ruler and Anthony Ullmann (eds.), *Ethics: with Samuel Beckett’s Notes*, trans. Martin Wilson (Leiden and Boston, 2006), p. 305.

<sup>63</sup> C. J. Ackerley, “‘I Think I Am’: Review of Arnold Geulincx: *Ethics*”, *Journal of Beckett Studies*, 17 (2008), p. 200.

<sup>64</sup> E.g. *The Tulia Herald*, Vol. 50, No. 52, 24 December 1959, p. 14, Web, 1 May 2017. E.g. *Life* magazine, 18 August 1941, p. 29.

nothing that is objective in other ways, like death. More generally, it is any nothing that is not defined in relation to a lack of something else.

Running these nothings together, the simplest sense of the phrase would be “nothing is the superlatively real thing”, perhaps because it is what existed before things and it is what will exist after things, or perhaps because it has a greater magnitude than them in the universe ([t]here’s no lack of void’).<sup>65</sup> This sense might suggest Sigmund Freud’s ‘death instinct’ [*Todestrieb*] in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), the ‘aim’ that all organic matter has to return to a state of inertness.<sup>66</sup> Or it might suggest Arthur Schopenhauer’s ‘*principium individuationis*’ in *The World as Will and Presentation* (1818), the individual life decanted from a universal motive force (the ‘will’) and rehearsing for its extinction by snuffing out ‘wishes’ wherever they unfortunately arise.<sup>67</sup> The thought in both cases is that there is something anterior to conscious or phenomenal reality and that something is nothing. Its realness seems to consist in that anteriority, like a metaphysical prime-mover, though it does not necessarily have to be metaphysical. (Unless otherwise stated, metaphysical is understood to mean something that exists behind or before physical or concrete things, either having a causative relation to them or being the denuded but unavailable or only partially available reality of them.) Its unreassuring concreteness might, in fact, be what Beckett likes about nothing. It is unavailable like a hidden ideal realm, or noumenon, but without the consoling mystical connotations.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> The quotation is from *Waiting for Godot* (1953) [1948]. Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, in *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 61.

<sup>66</sup> It might also suggest much of Ecclesiastes, e.g. 3:20: ‘[a]ll go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again.’ The way that Freud puts it is ‘the aim of all life is death’. I discuss Freud and Beckett in detail in chapter 3. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), in James Strachey (ed. and trans.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 19 (London: Verso, 2001), p. 38.

<sup>67</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Presentation*, Vol 1, trans. Richard E. Aquila (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 303, xii-xiii.

<sup>68</sup> The literature on Beckett and Schopenhauer is copious. For Beckett’s reading of Schopenhauer as a philosopher among Beckett’s other philosophical influences (Democritus, Geulincx, Descartes), see J. D. O’Hara. ‘Where There’s a Will There’s a Way Out: Beckett and Schopenhauer’, *College Literature*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (1981). For Beckett, Schopenhauer and psychoanalysis, see J. D. O’Hara, *Samuel Beckett’s Hidden Drives: Structural Uses of Depth Psychology* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1997). For Beckett and Schopenhauer on



Beckett's fondness for Schopenhauer and, to a lesser extent, Freud, would support this hypothesis. Writing to Thomas MacGreevy in July 1930, Beckett says he is 'reading Schopenhauer', much to everyone's derision; and that his work is the 'greatest' 'intellectual justification of unhappiness [...] that has ever been attempted'.<sup>69</sup> Writing to MacGreevy again in September 1937, he adds that Schopenhauer 'was one of the ones that mattered most to me', and that he is 'a philosopher that can be read like a poet' (*LSB* 1, 550). The thesis will argue that Beckett is reading Schopenhauer's economics poetically, not metaphysically, except insofar as the confusion of the 'metaphysical' and the 'concrete' is Beckett's object.

It seems to follow from this demystified noumenon that the 'real', being doubly unavailable, should be understood as a valuable 'commodity', as Beckett himself might put it.<sup>70</sup> In his monograph on *Proust* (1931), 'reality' is valuable because it eludes cognitive representations.<sup>71</sup> 'The creature of habit', writes Beckett, 'turns aside from the object that cannot be made to correspond with one or other of his intellectual prejudices, that resists the propositions of his team of syntheses, organised by Habit on labour-saving principles' (*Pr*, 23). An individual 'habit' of thought, or 'concept', is the 'object' killed off by 'desire', meaning that desire's job is to make the world safe by internalising it as a system of adequate concepts (*Pr*, 15). Capital-H 'Habit' is the name Beckett gives for the sum total of adequate concepts (*Pr*, 18-9). 'Suffering' is the lack of an adequate concept for an object (*Pr*, 20). It is amorphous, unprocessed sense-data, which the human organism is constitutively disposed to interpret as 'dangerous,

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music, see John Pilling, 'Proust and Schopenhauer: Music and Shadows', in Mary Bryden (ed.), *Samuel Beckett and Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998). For Schopenhauer as a 'conduit for other influences' on Beckett, see Erik Tonning, "'I am not reading philosophy": Beckett and Schopenhauer', in Matthew Feldman and Karim Mamdani (ed.), *Beckett/Philosophy* (Stuttgart: *ibidem* Press, 2015).

<sup>69</sup> Beckett, *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Vol. 1, 1929-1940*, eds. George Craig, Martha Dow Fehsenfeld, Dan Gunn and Lois More Overbeck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 33.

<sup>70</sup> '[W]orld' and 'self' are 'esteemed commodities' in the 'Three Dialogues with George Duthuit' (1948). Beckett, 'Three Dialogues with George Duthuit', in *Disjecta*, p. 143.

<sup>71</sup> Beckett, *Proust*, in *Proust and Three Dialogues with George Duthuit* (London: John Calder Publishers, 1999), p. 22.

precarious, painful', firstly because we do not know what an object means for our needs and vulnerabilities until we have nailed it down conceptually in terms of them, and secondly because the aconceptual as such is perceived to be a threat to the integrity of concept-making creatures like us (*Pr*, 19). When a concept fails or has not yet been adequately formed to encompass new objects, the world appears to shudder out of focus. But it is really shuddering into focus, Beckett says, because that world was only ever our world of concepts, of expediently internalised representations of objects. 'Reality', the pre- or non-conceptual, is what will not be assimilated by the subject and its contaminating needs (*Pr*, 22). This is suffering for the subject whose need means that they can only form concepts on the basis of them.

Laura Salisbury discusses *Proust* in economic terms in *Samuel Beckett: Laughing Matters, Comic Timing* (2012). '[H]abit subtends the logic of capitalist production' because it is based on 'labour-saving principles', efficiency savings in the realm of knowledge (Salisbury 2012, 109). This is an 'unconscious submission to the way things are' in two senses: the status quo is unthinkingly reproduced by an uncritical acceptance of 'pre-existing conceptual categories', and the habitual exister is implicitly conserving his energies for the real 'labour' of wage labour (Salisbury 2012, 2010). Salisbury implies that Beckett is aware of the kind of ideological apparatus that drills the capitalist subject with an ethic of stupefying habit when he alludes to the 'art of publicity' (*Pr*, 17). Incidentally, the specific "artwork" in this case is the advert for a digestive product manufactured by Beecham's Pills Ltd., whose founder Thomas Beecham was a shepherd before he became a purveyor of doubtful anodynes for ambiguous modern malaises (*Pr* 23, 17).<sup>72</sup>

Salisbury's economic interpretation of *Proust* suggests a more down-to-earth interpretation of the Geulincx quotation. 'Nothing to lose' describes a real condition

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<sup>72</sup> "Beechalax" was advertised with an exhortation for regular evening use, demonstrating an indifference to our prior commitments which Beckett likens to another kind of evacuation, that of sudden death. E.g. 'A Dose at Night with Keep Your Right / Beecham's Pills / A Pill's the Thing'. 'A Pill's the Thing', *The Methodist Leader*, January 21 1926, p. 48.

without things. Put this way, it sounds less like a predicament of absolute need and more like a smug anti-consumerist cliché or a strong bargaining position in game theory. The person who has nothing cannot become worse off than they are. This is a strong position because the possible outcomes of action, vis-à-vis having things, are limited to being positive or neutral. ‘Nothing to lose’ also represents a position of freedom from the anxiety of loss or bad luck, inhibiting the self-interested curb on high-risk behaviour. This is regarded as an enviable condition to people with things to lose, because risk-taking behaviour is ambivalently celebrated in most capitalist societies. Through this economic logic, ‘[n]othing to lose’ summons its opportunistic counterpart, “everything to gain”, so it is surprising to find the opposite on the other side of the comma. The sentence looks like a chiasmus, the x-shape rhetorical construction in which one thing rises as the other thing falls. The chiasmus is an important trope in Beckett’s writing, as Dirk Van Hulle explains:

If Beckett’s writing method can be described as “intentionally working towards ambiguity”, the x-shape is more than merely a stylistic ornament. It is a structural device, marking an ontological state of not knowing [...]. Instead of replacing the *x* and filling the gap with some comforting surrogate, Beckett matched each suggestion (e.g. “good”) by an equal reverse reaction (“such as sad or bad”) and thus approached what in chemistry is known as a condition of tense equilibrium, marked by the principle of reversibility: a stillness consisting of microscopic stirrings’.<sup>73</sup>

For Van Hulle, Beckett’s chiasmuses work towards ambiguity by pitching equal and opposite values or contents against one another. They oscillate around a point of equilibrium that is the undecidable centre of whatever spectrum of value or meaning happens to be in question. But ‘nothing to gain’ is only a partial inversion of ‘[n]othing to lose’, producing a y-shape rather than an x. The proposition’s strangeness arises from this imbalance. What does ‘nothing to gain’ mean, when it is causally related to ‘[n]othing to lose’? A person with nothing to gain might have everything already, or they might be in a situation that precludes gain. Logically, a person with nothing to lose

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<sup>73</sup> I dispute this reading of equilibrium as an immobile or only microscopically mobile deadlock in chapter 2. Van Hulle, ‘Beckett’s Principle of Reversibility: Chiasmus and the “Shape of Ideas”’, *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd’hui: Where Never Before: Beckett’s Poetics of Elsewhere*, Vol. 21 (2009), p. 189.

is unlikely to be someone who has everything already, so the situation described is probably one in which having nothing entails not being able to gain anything, or, more obscurely, entails the lack of anything to gain. There is a roundabout way of making the obscure sense of the phrase work, but it is inertly tautological. Geulincx's first nothing might be acting like Democritus's second, a nothing that objectively or materially exists, so that the sense is: "if I lose this objective nothing, I will be able to regain it". But the first sense is more compelling.

If nothing is superlatively real, then having nothing to gain might be congenial to 'reality' because it allows things to exist unmolested by the subject's cloying need of them. This puritanical view of the phenomenal subject, unhappily shut in by his own desire, might call to mind Schopenhauer's *principium individuationis* again. However, the emphasis in *Proust* on fidelity to the particularity of objects, rather than the uncomfortable predicament of estrangement from the will or noumenon per se, suggests a different but related source. In the *Critique of Judgement* (1790), Immanuel Kant analyses and orders four categories of aesthetic enjoyment: the pleasant, the beautiful, the sublime and the good. Beauty, for Kant, is the basis of universality, because it involves a 'disinterested' appreciation of the object.<sup>74</sup> For him, '[a]ll interest presupposes or generates a want; and, as the determining ground of assent, it leaves the judgement about the object no longer free' (Kant 2005, 33). When a want is present in the assent to a given satisfaction, it is deemed to be an interested satisfaction. '[T]he faculty of judging an object' that does not 'rest on any inclination of the subject' is a judgement of taste (Kant 2005, 33). Taste has a subjective element and an objective element. On the objective side, only certain objects are said to occasion disinterested satisfaction, because they do not provoke the subject into finding 'satisfaction in any private conditions associated with his own subject' (Kant 2005, 33). These Kant calls beautiful. A beautiful object 'is that which apart from concepts is represented as the

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<sup>74</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. J. H. Bernard (New York: Dover Publications, 2005), p. 32.

object of a universal satisfaction' (Kant 2005, 33). The beautiful object is like the object of suffering in *Proust*, since it 'cannot be made to correspond with one or other of [the subject's] intellectual prejudices' or 'conceptions'. Kant thinks that it is the basis for universal satisfaction, because the subject who 'feels himself quite free as regards the satisfaction which he attaches to the object [...] has reason for attributing a similar satisfaction to every one' (Kant 2005, 33). This is the subjective (or subjectively universal) element. The subject must be free of those contaminatingly subjective wants and interests that obscure the object's universally satisfying 'characteristic' (Kant 2005, 34). So '[i]t is only when the want is appeased that we can distinguish which of many men has or has not taste' (Kant 2005, 33).

It follows from this that the person with 'nothing to gain' would be entirely free of the subjective element of interest that disqualifies other less impossibly temperate persons from the judgment of taste. He can rightly 'claim validity for everyone' in his aesthetic judgements, because there is no danger whatever that he will succumb to the unfreedom of 'satisfaction in any private conditions'; he is absolutely 'free as regards the satisfaction which he attaches to the object'. Like the reality-seeker in *Proust*, Kant's universal aesthete has access to something more real than the usual fare, 'in respect of the satisfaction without the intervention of concepts' (Kant 2005, 37). Beckett would call that kind of non-conceptual satisfaction 'suffering', but the similarity holds at the structural level. For Kant, then, nothing is more real than objects that produce satisfaction/suffering without a concept, 'for from concepts there is no transition to the feeling of pleasure or pain' (Kant 2005, 34).

Beckett first read Kant in 1938, when he bought all eleven volumes of his complete *Werke* (1912) in German, and raved about them to Arland Usher ('I read nothing, unless it is Kant' (*LSB* 1, 622)). The criticism on Beckett and Kant has tended to focus on epistemology, with two notable exceptions: David Lloyd's analysis of *How It Is* and the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), which I discuss at length in chapter 4, and

Bjørn K. Myskja's book *The Sublime in Kant and Beckett* (2002). In the latter, Myskja argues that 'the formal feature of self-doubt or self-negation' in *Molloy* is 'mathematically sublime' because 'comprehension' of it as a 'united totality' is blocked by the sheer number of possible interpretations, or 'images of the story', that it offers the reader.<sup>75</sup> In *Proust*, however, Beckett is concerned with objects of experience that *temporarily* elude the subject's 'team of syntheses', and this means that he is not describing the sublime. The subject may have failed to 'comprehend' an object, but the failure is quickly and automatically corrected, with a new 'concept' closing over it and (in Beckett's view) distorting its 'reality', since it not really 'a united totality', only something that has temporarily confounded his established but ever-changing conceptual framework. Beckett is not describing the (mathematical) sublime in *Proust*, though it is tempting to think that he is, since the sublime is also a kind of suffering that obtains to a failure of 'comprehension' [*Zusammenfassung*], the ability 'to grasp an object as a united totality' (Myskja 2002, 135).

In terms of epistemological criticism, P. J. Murphy's essays 'Beckett and the Philosophers' (1992) and 'Beckett's Critique of Kant' (2015) are characteristic. Across both essays, Murphy reads *Watt* as a 'Kantian novel', partly because of its several apparent references to Kant, but mainly because it tests the 'distinctions and boundaries between the noumenal and the phenomenal' realms, or 'what man could and could not know'.<sup>76</sup> This is borne out, for instance, by the Mauthnerian linguistic scepticism Watt articulates with respect to his pot ('it was in vain that Watt said, Pot, pot' (*Wa*, 67)). At the structural level, Murphy writes in 'Beckett's Critique of Kant', Beckett's Kantianism is 'dramatised in the journey of Watt to the house of Mr Knott', where Knott's house stands for an unavailable or partially unavailable noumenal realm

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<sup>75</sup> Bjørn K. Myskja, *The Sublime in Kant and Beckett: Aesthetic Judgement, Ethics and Literature* (New York: De Gruyter, 2002), p. 273.

<sup>76</sup> P. J. Murphy, 'Beckett and the Philosophers', *The Cambridge Companion to Samuel Beckett* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 229. Murphy, 'Beckett's Critique of Kant', in *Beckett/Philosophy*, ed. Matthew Feldman and Karim Mamdani (Stuttgart: ibidem, 2015), p. 270.

(Murphy 2015, 267). There Murphy argues that Beckett's work from *Watt* to *How It Is* contains a 'reconstructive' or 'critical' engagement with Kant that has been occluded by a scholarly 'ideology of negativity' (Murphy 2015, 268). Simon Critchley is singled out as an exemplary culprit, with Murphy arguing forcefully that he is wrong to believe Beckett's work is 'uniquely [...] resistant to philosophical interpretation' (Murphy 2015, 277).<sup>77</sup>

'Beckett's Critique of Kant' is meant to be a kind of "prolegomenon" for the future study of Beckett and Kant, Murphy says, and the essay's mode is synoptic, covering a number of discrete, possible intersections between the two (Murphy 2015, 272). Murphy touches briefly on Kant's concept of the beauty in the *Critique of Judgement*, emphasising the element of disinterestedness or, on the side of the object, non-'purposiveness', in Arsene's speech in *Watt* about 'coming and being and going in purposelessness' (*Wa*, 49). If there is an 'ideology of negativity' in Beckett Studies, it surely takes its cue from readings like this, celebrating the austere mysticism of disinterested subjects and purposeless objects, and transferring the noumenal logic of unavailability to the critical object, Beckett's texts.

Pierre Bourdieu disagrees with both Murphy and Kant about the possibility of disinterested judgement. 'The pure gaze', he writes in *Distinction* (1979), 'implies a break with the ordinary attitude towards the world, which, given the conditions in which it is performed, is also a social separation' (Bourdieu 1984, 4). Judgement is a form of social separation because 'preferences in literature, painting or music' are verifiably 'linked to educational level [...] and secondarily to social origin' (Bourdieu 1984, 1). The 'hierarchy of the arts' corresponds to the 'social hierarchy of the consumers', so that assertions of preference or taste 'function as markers of class' (Bourdieu 1984, 1-2). Artworks police this social hierarchy by developing increasingly

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<sup>77</sup> Simon Critchley, *Very Little ... Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 165.

complex ‘codes’ (e.g. ‘styles’) that require correspondingly specialist ‘knowledge’ [*savoir*] to ‘see’ [*voir*] or understand them properly (Bourdieu 1984, 2). “‘Open work’”, work that is ‘intrinsically and deliberately polysemic’, is ‘the final stage in the conquest of artistic autonomy’ (Bourdieu 1984, 3). It is autonomous because it refers exclusively to codes developed within ‘the universe of past and present artworks’, meaning that both the artworks and the people who appreciate them stand apart from the material world they both inhabit (Bourdieu 1984, 3). This makes it a good candidate for ‘disinterestedness’, since an artwork that does not refer to the world would have difficulty referring to the wants and interests that are satisfied in it (Bourdieu 1984, 4-5). Art that performs a recognisable ‘function’, even a function like ‘representation’, is therefore opposed to the ‘aesthetic quality of contemplation’ (Bourdieu 1984, 5). (There is a faint contradiction, here, with Bourdieu’s claim that ‘[i]ntellectuals could be said to believe in the representation – literature, theatre, painting – more than in the things represented’ (Bourdieu 1984, 5).) This means that

the detachment of the pure gaze cannot be dissociated from a general disposition towards the world which is the paradoxical product of conditioning by negative economic necessities – a life of ease – that ends to induce an active distance from necessity. (Bourdieu 1984, 5)

Kant has his causality the wrong way around. The best objects of aesthetic enjoyment do not intrinsically call for disinterested judgement. People with easy lives valorise detachment because it is a mark of distinction, so aesthetic objects that lend themselves to detached satisfactions have been valorised too. The ideal consumer is relatively free from the vicissitudes of individual wants and interests, but only because he is relatively free from the ‘necessities of the natural and social world’ (Bourdieu 1984, 5). This makes him less ‘universal’, in Kant’s terms, not more. The distractions he must avoid are not his hopelessly individual needs, but the inconveniences of objective economic ‘necessity’. Disinterested judgement is supremely interested, because it enshrines a logic of value that favours and protects those with most to lose, not least. As the representative of a miniscule elite which takes up the vast majority of our material



resources, it is in his interests to valorise aesthetic self-denial, so that the rest of society can literalise it on his behalf. Thought through in these terms, Bourdieu's earlier comment about intellectuals loses its contradictoriness. 'Intellectuals [...] believe in the representation – literature, theatre, painting – more than in the things represented' because they regard economic and aesthetic interest as inversely proportional (Bourdieu 1984, 5). This is why they want to make material deprivation and aesthetic self-denial look like they have a non-figurative relationship. For the cultural 'aristocracy', aesthetic detachment is a kind of allegory for economic independence (Bourdieu 1984, 11).

Elizabeth Barry makes a similar point at the end of her essay on 'Beckett, Bourdieu and the Resistance to Consumption' (2006). Beckett's characters 'reverse the law of cultural capital', she writes, because they practice 'a kind of willed self-dispossession that resists assimilation to the prevailing social system'.<sup>78</sup> They do this in three main ways. First, their failure to grasp the social rules of 'propriety' mean that they 'resist' interpellation in Michel de Certeau's "grid of discipline", the system whereby economic capitalism regulates the individual's relationship with [...] everyday experience' (Barry 2006, 31). Second, Beckett's thematisation of poverty and recurrent use of digestive tropes resist 'the capitalist act *par excellence*, the act of consumption itself' (Barry 2006, 32). Third and relatedly, Beckett resists the hygienic norms of 'bourgeois art' by 'expressing the most basic processes of the body' (Barry 2006, 39). Taken together, this constitutes a reversal of the law of cultural capital because social propriety, consumption and cultivated squeamishness are signs of economic status. While Bourdieu would agree that 'taste' is characterised by a puritanical rejection of 'vulgar' embodied enjoyment, he argues that this is based on a prior logic of 'detachment' from the world that is not easily distinguishable from Beckett's wholesale rejection of consumption, especially the consumption of 'food' and 'love' (Bourdieu 2005, 4).

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<sup>78</sup> Elizabeth Barry, 'Beckett, Bourdieu and the Resistance to Consumption', *Modernist Cultures*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (2006), p. 40.

Furthermore, Bourdieu identifies artworks that, in Barry's terms, 'evade definition through difference in terms of genre, literary history and cultural status' as 'autonomous', meaning that they uphold 'the law of cultural capital', which values art the more it draws on 'heterogeneous' sources in 'literary history' ('the universe of past and present works of art') (Barry 2005, 39, 40). I would argue that this supervenes on content that expresses bodily processes, especially given Beckett's consistent emphasis on disgust, displeasure and the disavowal of desire.

If this reading is right, Bourdieu has followed Kant's logic to a point of ironic reversal. The best candidates for disinterestedness will not be found in the leisure class, who are relatively free from private satisfactions; they are found among people with 'nothing to gain', who are categorically free from them. The irony of this is not lost on Beckett, for whom class and 'indifference' become central around *Murphy*, and perhaps even earlier (*Mu*, 67). Vivian Mercier notes their importance in *Beckett/Beckett* (1977), where he elaborates the 'class fractions' of Beckett's characters from 1934 to 1964 in a chapter called 'Gentleman/Tramp' (Bourdieu 1984, 6). The protagonists of *More Pricks than Kicks* and *Murphy* belong 'to the upper middle classes, by birth at least', eating lobster and surviving off a decent stipend from a wealthy uncle.<sup>79</sup> Watt is both a 'clochard' ("tramp") and a 'university man', but he is surely first and foremost a domestic servant, a detail Mercier overlooks (Mercier 1977, 54; *Wa*, 17). Vladimir and Estragon are members of the '*Lumpenproletariat*', but not as perennially as it might look: Vladimir is as outraged by Estragon's manners as he is by Lucky's treatment by Pozzo, suggesting that he has belonged to polite society, or wanted to; and Estragon knows a bit of Shelley's 'To the Moon' (1824) (Mercier 1977, 50, 52). Mercier thinks that Moran's penchant for theological problems suggests he has 'attended a seminary', and that his occasional showy literary allusions (e.g. 'the Great Gustave') indicate he has a chip on his shoulder about his educational background (Mercier 1977, 50; *Mo*, 121). He

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<sup>79</sup> Vivian Mercier, *Beckett/Beckett* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 54.

is certainly a Flaubert-like caricature of the petit-bourgeoisie, calculating and repressed, paranoically concerned about appearances and always looking to score a victory; we know that his prodigious downfall is complete when the electricity company have 'cut off the light' (what would Father Ambrose or the Elsner twins think of that?) (*Mo*, 169). Molloy is a shining catastrophe, a man so ill-equipped for social existence that he hands a police officer a soiled newspaper when he is asked for ID (id?), but he is 'cultivated' too, as comfortable with art history as with Locke and Lucretius in the original, showing a passing, dilettantish interest in 'astronomy', 'geology', 'anthropology', 'psychiatry' and even 'magic' (Mercier 1977, 50; *Mo*, 35). Malone, who owns one boot and discriminates between his meal and his chamber pot with a wooden stick, also shows signs of being or having been a 'gentleman' with a 'deeply ingrained' sense of 'decorum' (Mercier 1977, 52). One incarnation of the Unnamable is a quadruple amputee rammed in a 'jar' and used as an 'advertisement', a circumstance that is forced back into economic relation (advertising) when it seems to have escaped by means of unmediated brutality (*Un*, 322). Last and probably least, the narrator of *How It Is*, who might well be learned if he had any 'memory' to put culture in, is flat on his face in the mud in a world whose material comforts extend to 'burst' jute sacks and 'mouldy' tinned fish, distributed in the mud by an executive 'intelligence' which apparently wants to ensure that people torture one another as efficiency as possible (*HII*, 9, 45, 5, 181, 189).

Mercier describes the downward class trajectory of Beckett's writing as a '*dégringolade*', a "tumble down" the economic ladder (Mercier 1977, 58). Paying close attention to the myriad, often conflicting elements that go into the presentation of his characters, Mercier concludes that they are not the unqualified '*clochards*' or '*Lumpenproletariat*' that he imagines people take them for. Mercier's argument has the same implicit premise as Bourdieu's, that 'cultural competence' is or ought to be consistent with economic status (Bourdieu 1984, 4). Beckett's "down-and-out" characters clearly mock that belief by possessing a range of incongruous economic

signifiers. They do so, however, in what appears to be an ‘autonomous’ setting, so that the reader or audience assumes that the economic content of the work is partly or entirely nonrepresentational. To what extent, then, does the appearance of autonomy depend on the assumption that those signifiers are incongruous? If the economic content of *Waiting for Godot* appears to be nonrepresentational, is it partly because a person in rags has pretentious manners, or a person who sleeps in a ditch half-remembers some Shelley, and numerous other details like this? If this is even slightly true, the appearance of nonrepresentationality is based on a classist assumption that ‘cultural competence’ is consistent with economic status. The extent to which economics is regarded as nonrepresentational would be a reflection of the politics of the viewer, in respect of their prejudices about what constitutes a plausible economic ‘class fraction’. This is not to say that there are not aspects of the play’s economic content that are exaggerated. It would not be classist to think that Pozzo and Lucky are partly nonrepresentational on the grounds that landlords with literal slaves do not tend to share a world with people sleeping in ditches who once read Romantic poetry (*Go*, 11). Clearly these moments of nonreferentiality or distorted referentiality destabilise the category of representation to a certain extent.<sup>80</sup> However, to decide that nothing about the play is representational because one element of it is not directly representational is a revealingly exaggerated reaction. The belief that one cue can fix a text’s distance from referentiality belies a predisposition to make autonomous interpretations. Since that is absolutely economic in nature, it is arguably more revealing than overt classism. Let’s imagine that Estragon’s poetic tastes do not contribute to the play’s appearance of autonomy at all. If that were the case, the assertion that his class is nonrepresentational would be based on a groundless, dogmatic belief that the economic content is simply not describing things in the world, because it is ‘vague’ about things like the

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<sup>80</sup> That said, the relationship between Pozzo and Lucky does have innumerable economic referents in the world. It is, for the most part, a relatively mild hyperbole, not a symbol for something else. This means that this counterargument was invalid from the start, but I could not identify a more plausibly “nonrepresentational” aspect of the play’s economic content.

significance of Godot. Both ways in which it is possible to read Beckett nonrepresentationally – because the referents are alleged not to exist, because they do exist but it is nevertheless nonrepresentational – are a reflection, then, of the audience's economic position. It is unusually true of Beckett that '[t]aste classifies, and it classifies the classifier' (Bourdieu 1984, 6). In Bourdieu's terms, we are policing the equation of economics and culture wherever we assert that the economic content of Beckett's work is being used in an autonomous way, providing that it is legible as a representation. His portrayals of heterogeneous class fractions certainly are legible as representations, and much besides them, as this thesis will argue.

The problem is more tenacious when the corpus as a whole is considered. The overarching downward class trajectory, as the work becomes more amenable to autonomous readings, puts the reader or viewer in the position of having to assert one of two things. Either poverty is being used to "thematise" disinterestedness, with poor people symbolising the non-material forms of asceticism that autonomous readings tend to discover in Beckett ('nothing to gain'), including the predicament of the ascetic consumer who wants to read Beckett autonomously. This is logically consistent if morally abhorrent. Or disinterestedness in all its forms is the privilege of people who are materially poor, which is why Beckett gives increasing prominence in his work to representations of material poverty. Logically, this would mean the work is not 'autonomous', i.e. based on the valorisation of disinterestedness, contradicting the principle on which poor people are given increasing prominence. In the first instance, the victims of economic violence are held up as a symbol; in the second instance they are held up as an abstract ideal. Economics is a fetish for the cultural aristocracy, or it is an allegory for aesthetic or spiritual self-denial.

Only two forms of asceticism have been mentioned so far: Kant's valorisation of disinterested aesthetic judgement in the *Critique of Judgement* and Schopenhauer's noumenal will-lessness in *The World as Will and Presentation*. Beckett's interest in

asceticism has been linked to a number of other sources that share Kant's and Schopenhauer's belief in the positive benefits of the retrenchment of desire. Thomas à Kempis, Giacomo Leopardi, Arnold Geulincx, Robert Burton and St. Augustine are among the figures who have been identified in this connection. Schopenhauer, who is another, studied world religions and was apparently 'surpris[ed]' to find an 'exact connection' between them on this point. He described this common tendency as 'quietism'.<sup>81</sup> Many influential critics have argued, with different accents but essentially the same meaning, for 'Beckett's lifelong aesthetic and personal commitment to a quietist attitude', as Mark Nixon and Dirk Van Hulle put it.<sup>82</sup> Chris Ackerley, David Tucker, Matthew Feldman and Andy Wimbush are among them. Ackerley defines quietism as a 'doctrine of extreme asceticism and contemplative devotion that the chief duty of man is the contemplation of God, or Christ, to become independent of outward circumstances and sensual distraction'.<sup>83</sup> Beckett's quietism is 'secular' because of his suspicion of religion, or 'agnostic' because it is more 'open ended' than that word suggests.<sup>84</sup> Either way, it is characterised by asceticism, an autarkical withdrawal from the material world, and in most accounts, 'the virtue humility' (Ackerley 2000, 81).<sup>85</sup> Quietist approaches to Beckett are probably the dominant critical paradigm today, as this venerable list of scholars will suggest.

Mercier understands Beckett's interest in 'down and out' figures in similarly spiritual terms.<sup>86</sup> Beckett has a nearly 'hippie'-ish tendency to 'toy' with the creative 'possibilities' afforded by the symbol of the 'tramp', Mercier says, but their 'destitution'

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<sup>81</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Presentation*, Vol. 2, trans. Richard E. Aquila (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 683.

<sup>82</sup> Nixon and Van Hulle, *Samuel Beckett's Library* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 27.

<sup>83</sup> Ackerley, 'Samuel Beckett and Thomas à Kempis: The Roots of Quietism', in Marius Bunin, Matthijs Engelberts and Onno Kusters (eds.), *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui*, Vol. 9, *Beckett and Religion: Beckett / Aesthetics / Politics* (Atlanta, Ga: Rodopi, 2000), p. 88.

<sup>84</sup> Matthew Feldman, *Falsifying Beckett: Essays on Archives, Philosophy, and Methodology in Beckett Studies* (Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2014), pp. 111-2.

<sup>85</sup> See also Tucker, *Samuel Beckett and Arnold Geulincx*, p. 44-5. Andy Wimbush, 'The Pretty Quietist Pater: Samuel Beckett's *Molloy* and the Aesthetics of Quietism', *Literature and Theology*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (Dec 2016), pp. 439-40.

<sup>86</sup> Beckett, 'The End', in *The Complete Short Prose*, pp. 66.

really does amount to a ‘liberation’ from the hollowness of social conventions across the economic spectrum (Mercier 1977, 72). Mercier concludes that ‘the image of the tramp as scapegoat, the tramp as ironic, half-involuntary Christ’ is ‘always [...] at the back of [Beckett’s] mind’ (Mercier 1977, 72). This is a virtuous thing, we are given to understand, because Christ’s material asceticism comes with reimbursements, but the tramp’s involuntariness means that he is in no danger of creating a messianic black market, where ostentatious displays of selflessness are repaid in admiration or celebrity. This is an odd moment in Mercier’s argument. On the one hand, the tramp-Christ “represents” a senseless extreme of asceticism, a Geulingian refusal to gain anything by losing anything. A real person who lived by this principle would be dead in a matter of days. On the other hand, the tramp-Christ is a repudiation of the logic of asceticism, the valorisation of self-denial as a way of disguising real material interests. This means that it is repudiating the conflation of economics and aesthetics on which its purported “autonomy” as a symbol is based. In other words, if we take poverty in Beckett to be nonrepresentational, then one of the things it is symbolising is the fact that the assertion of nonrepresentationality is based on the kind of economic violence that literalises poverty in the world it is eschewing. This makes this economic content inescapably referential. If it is referential it is a representation, and if it is not then it refers to the economic circumstances of its imputed nonrepresentationality.

Mercier hardly discusses the writing before *Watt*, on the grounds that Beckett had not begun his *dégringolade* until then. But *More Pricks than Kicks*, selectively cannibalised from the then-unpublished *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (1992) [1932], is already pointing in that direction. The second story, ‘Ding Dong’, is a formative moment, showing Beckett’s later, ‘polysemic’ style emerging from a critical awareness of class (Bourdieu 1984, 3):

[Belacqua] was at pains to make it clear to me, and to all those to whom he exposed his manoeuvre, that it was in no way cognate with the popular act of brute labour, digging and such like exploited to disperse the dumps, an antidote depending for its

efficaciousness on mere physical exhaustion, and for which he expressed the greatest contempt.<sup>87</sup>

Belacqua's 'manoeuvre' is a daily 'boomerang' from here to there, e.g. the pub, and back again. Listless *flânerie* is like manual work insofar as both are a bathos on the epic loop of 'going out' and 'coming in', exertion and 'exhaustion', with the difference that Belacqua's quest inverts the classical pattern of 'glad' adventure and 'sad' homecoming.<sup>88</sup> People do not do 'brute labour' because they are 'exploited', a word that has been spitefully relocated to imply that they are the ones unjustly enjoying the advantages of free work. People voluntarily engage in brute labour because it helps to 'disperse the dumps', a phrase that suggests smearing shit as well as dispelling babyish suffering. The thought is not unlike J. M. Keynes's suggestion, mentioned earlier in the introduction, that the bourgeois ought to be allowed to 'tyrannise over his bank balance' rather than his 'fellow citizens', since without the 'comparatively harmless channels' that capitalism provides, other much more 'dangerous human proclivities' might not be 'canalised' in them (Keynes 2015, 374). But Belacqua's 'contempt' is reserved instead for the 'weary proletarians' whom Keynes regarded as the proper grooves into which, for the good of society, tyrannical capitalists must be permitted to siphon off their harmful impulses. This is because, unlike Belacqua, they are immature quietists, lacking the courage or intelligence to pacify Schopenhauer's externalised, restive motive force, or 'what he called the Furies', by inhabiting a 'Beethoven pause, whatever he meant by that' (*DD*, 31). What he meant by that might be what Beckett means in the 1937 'German Letter' to Axel Kaun, where he imagines a kind of writing that is like the Allegretto from Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, a 'sound surface [...]

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<sup>87</sup> Beckett, 'Ding-Dong', in *More Pricks Than Kicks*, ed. Cassandra Nelson (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), p. 32.

<sup>88</sup> '[G]lad going out and sad coming in' is a quotation from Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ* (1427), but references to 'Pylades and Orestes' and 'The Furies', as well as the 'boomerang[ing]' structure of the voyage, suggest a classical counterpoint (*DD*, 31). John Pilling, *Samuel Beckett's More Pricks Than Kicks: In a Strait of Two Wills* (London: Continuum, 2011), p. 154.



torn by enormous pauses'.<sup>89</sup> Schopenhauer, whom Beckett is channelling there, believed that certain kinds of music are 'an immediate copy of the will itself' and have the power to stun it into temporary quiescence (*GL*, 172). But 'weary proletarians' depend instead on the 'great C major symphony of supply and demand', probably Schubert's Ninth, to subdue them in a merely 'physical' sense (*DD*, 36).<sup>90</sup> This dependence is inferior, Belacqua thinks, because it mistakes contingent economic imperatives like wage labour for the immutable metaphysical reality of the will, with the daily 'exhaustion' of 'proletarian' work regarded simultaneously as a panacea for, and an ersatz of, the real thing. The narrating voice sees through this sneering classism and attributes it to autarkical insecurity, an over-compensatory quietism that is really about the failure of 'self-sufficiency'. 'Yellow', the penultimate story in *More Pricks Than Kicks*, suggests a similarly defensive origin. Belacqua regrets that he is not aristocratically 'well bred'; that he is merely an 'indolent bourgeois poltroon' without 'blue blood'; and he attributes this, in part, to his petit-bourgeois 'grocer's sense of honour': a chippily stubborn refusal to admit weakness.<sup>91</sup> If he was really able to 'live' in a 'Beethoven pause', the narrator says, Belacqua would not be so 'anxi[ous]' to 'explain himself' (*DD*, 32). 'Nay', he mockingly continues, 'this anxiety in itself, or so at least it seemed to me, constituted a break-down in the self-sufficiency which he never wearied of arrogating to himself' (*DD*, 32). The pretentious oratorical tics, 'nay' and 'so at least

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<sup>89</sup> It is telling that, in the same letter, Beckett is still thinking of artworks in terms of class: '[g]rammar and Style [sic]. To me they seem to have become as irrelevant as a Victorian bathing suit or the imperturbability of a true gentleman'. Beckett, 'The German Letter of 1937', in *Disjecta*, pp. 46-7.

<sup>90</sup> Given the reference to Beethoven, here, it might make sense for the 'great C major symphony' to be one of his, too. But the only symphony in that key by Beethoven is the First, which probably doesn't deserve the appellation 'great'. John Pilling is therefore likely to be right that it refers to Schubert's 'great symphony', named by Schumann, which is also in C major (Pilling 2011, 59). Why Beckett chooses this piece to apotheosise 'supply and demand' is not clear. He is unlikely to be thinking of the second movement, a piece of great pathos and silliness, its quacking, quixotic oboe melody riding out hobbled troches like Moran 'on all fours shitting out [his] entrails' (*Mo*, 160). The third and fourth movements are almost kaleidoscopic, all manic, rambling arpeggios and hassled brass climaxes; they are also unlikely candidates for the steady grandeur that Beckett is imputing, in this story, to exchange society. The first movement is relatively dignified and expansive to begin with, making it the best candidate; but a sanguine, modestly triumphant fanfare degenerates into bloody-minded caesuras, blasting out like the opening of the first movement of Beethoven's Ninth, only more defiantly evacuatory.

<sup>91</sup> Beckett, 'Yellow', in *More Pricks Than Kicks*, p. 161.

it seemed to me', are a parody of Belacqua's snobbishness, suggesting it is an anachronism as well as a defence mechanism. Belacqua counters feebly that 'he had been drunk' when he protested too much, or that he is 'an incoherent person and content to remain so, and so on', excuses that the narrator finds exasperatingly perennial. This is why he 'gave him up in the end': 'he was not *serious*', the inflection aping Belacqua's tendency to make imperious pronouncements (*DD*, 32, emphasis in the text).

The narrator of 'Ding Dong' is Beckett's first first-person narrator, though there are numerous instances of unexpected interjections from ontologically vague figures in *More Pricks Than Kicks*, notably at the end of 'Dante and the Lobster'.<sup>92</sup> Their censorious removal from Belacqua's standpoint occurs in this collection because it is able to act as a counterweight to his 'ineffable superiority', his overt classism and recondite sphere of reference, which was part of the reason that *Dream* was rejected by publishers (Pilling 2011, 68). They allow Belacqua to sneer all he likes, while the narrator or narrating voice, acting as a kind of parabasis, abuses him for it on the reader's behalf. The perspective splits on class lines, with the worst of it, its 'metaphysical' pretensions, preserved and 'given up' as an object of ridicule. For Beckett, this divellication of voice performed the valuable function of making his writing less unmarketably objectionable from a class perspective. Its censorious side also signposted the downward economic trajectory Beckett's work would take. The critical voice that appears in *More Pricks Than Kicks* represents the first in a series of ironic ruptures, correlated (at the very least) with class, leading up to the incessantly self-negating voices of the Three Novels, and the 'open', 'polysemic' style that they entail.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> 'Well, thought Belacqua, it's a quick death, God help us all. / It is not.' Beckett, 'Dante and the Lobster', *More Pricks*, p. 14.

<sup>93</sup> E.g. 'Who now?'; 'I, say I, unbelieving'; 'aporia pure and simple'; 'affirmations and negations invalidated as uttered', etc. (*Un*, 285). As the number of voices increases, so do the number of possible meanings.

A contradiction emerges here: if autonomous art enshrines class distinctions, how can it arise from a critical awareness of class? Bourdieu writes that ‘the production of an “open work”, intrinsically and deliberately polysemic, can [...] be understood as the final stage in the conquest of artistic autonomy’ (Bourdieu 1984, 3). ‘To assert the autonomy of production’, he continues,

is to give primacy to that of which the artist is master, i.e. form, manner, style, rather than the “subject”, the external referent, which involves subordination to functions – even if only the most elementary one, that of representing, signifying, saying something. (Bourdieu 1984, 3)

Bourdieu is arguing that the kind of open, non-referential, polysemic artwork that Beckett made is guilty of the specious valorisation of disinterestedness that occurs when culture is a justification for social and economic hierarchies. He would seem to be right, considering Beckett’s manifesto-like commitment to ‘nothing’ in the ‘Three Dialogues with George Duthuit’ (1999) [1948]:

Nothing to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express. (*TD*, 139)

This is surely the most extreme formulation of an art that is the ‘product of conditioning by negative economic necessities’, because it advertises its total independence from all functionality, including the function of ‘representing, signifying, saying something’ (Bourdieu 1984, 5). Beckett’s pseudo-manifesto is the supreme ‘refusal to recognise any necessity other than that inscribed in the specific tradition of the artistic discipline in question’, putting itself at the greatest possible distance from history and praxis (Bourdieu 1984, 3). Theodor Adorno, who seems to be one of Bourdieu’s targets, agrees that Beckett is indeed ‘autonomous’ in roughly this way:

*Endgame* is neither a play about the atom bomb nor is it contentless; the determinate negation of its content becomes its formal principle and the negation of content altogether. Beckett’s oeuvre gives the frightful answer to art that, by its starting point, by its distance from any praxis, art in the face of mortal threat becomes ideology through the harmlessness of its mere form, regardless of its content. [...] Its most binding criterion today is that in terms of its own complexion, unreconciled to all realistic deception, it no longer tolerates anything harmless. In all

art that is still possible, social critique must be raised to the level of form, to the point that it wipes out all manifestly social content.<sup>94</sup>

The ‘formal principle’ of *Endgame* (1957) is the ‘negation of content altogether’, meaning that the play is neither ‘about the atom bomb’ nor not about it. If the play was unmistakably about the atom bomb – this “about” is where the problem of figurativeness becomes active – it would be an allegory, a story told at a reassuring distance from any ‘harm[ful]’ content that might be secreted in it, an antigenic dose of the real sickness. Hollowing out harmful ‘social content’ prevents it from being used, under the duress of harmfulness, to ‘reconcile’ the audience to that harm. The ambivalence of the missing referent(s), in this instance probably nuclear annihilation, stops it from being put at a soothing representational distance, neatly packaged in symbols, in the service of art’s disinterested narcosis. With ‘all manifestly social content wiped out’, the text is made to *speak* of ‘ideology’, not just be it, by being so impotently removed from ‘praxis [...] in the face of mortal threat’. This means that the play is really about the opposite of harmlessness per se, not one particular kind of it (‘it no longer tolerates *anything* harmless’). The text’s form does the work of ‘social critique’ that it could not do at the level of content without ‘realistic deception’ (‘representing, signifying, saying something’), while also indicating how the deceptions of realism inure audiences to the things being critiqued.

In the light of Adorno’s claims for the political value of Beckett’s nonrepresentational art, how are we to understand its seemingly unnegated economic content? What are the consequences of the prominent inscription, to use Bourdieu’s term, of economic necessity in artworks that otherwise do perform ‘social separation’ at the level of form, expunging nearly all other referents, and calling the tropological status of this key one into question? ‘Ding-Dong’ shows polysemy emerging as a consequence of Beckett’s critical awareness of economic class, not as a way of

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<sup>94</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, eds. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Bloomsbury, 2013). p. 399.

bolstering its claims to cultural superiority. Does it do this conscientiously, as Adorno seems to think, to implicate culture in the class society it is formally parodying? Is it advertising its provenance, like a Made in Germany tag, to reveal art's origins in ideology, while at the same time mimicking the operations of ideology, performing its high-art tricks of openness and polysemy? But wouldn't that make economics an 'external referent', linking it to the material 'necessities' it was supposed, in both accounts, to eschew? It would not only have failed to 'perform' its disinterested duty of 'social separation', it would have drawn attention to the basis on which that social separation occurs, namely class. It would not only have not wiped out 'all social contents', it would have neglected to wipe out the most pressing social contents of all, economics.

Each of the chapters in this thesis has a historical setting, a context in economic theory, and a theoretical framework from philosophy or psychoanalysis. Chapter 1, 'The Theme of the Five Biscuits / *Murphy's* "life-strike" in the Modernist Marketplace', begins with a selective history of the formation of political economy as an independent discipline, focusing on sources in theology and natural philosophy that were part of Beckett's eclectic reading habits in the early 1930s. It leads up to the theory of marginal utility, a pessimistic, dualistic theory of value with strikingly resembles Wylie's concept of desire in *Murphy*. Formulated simultaneously in three countries at the beginning of the 1870s, the supporters of Marginalism claimed that it was able to describe an unprecedented series of crises of "underconsumption" that classical political economy, with its emphasis on production-driven, "objective" value, could not. This consumer-oriented theory of value was concerned with the 'creation' of 'secondary privations': new wants that are 'awaken[ed]' when 'primary want[s]' are satisfied'.<sup>95</sup> It is a theory, in other words, of the value of newness. Started in 1935, *Murphy's* first line is an open retort to Ezra Pound's fiat of the previous year, 'Make it New'. The reason that '[things]

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<sup>95</sup> William Stanley Jevons, *The Theory of Political Economy*, ed. R. D. Collison (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 51.

will stay the same as they always were', Wylie asserts in Beckett's novel, is that 'humanity is a well with two buckets' oscillating around equilibrium (*Mu*, 62, 39). In a regime of value that is pegged to fluctuations in a closed system, there can be 'nothing new' under the 'sun' (*Mu*, 3). This chapter, reads *Murphy*'s protest against newness in the light of Modernism's affinities with a logic of value that subtends the capitalist market (*Mu*, 146). It starts from the position that Beckett's first published novel is a vitiated *Künstlerroman*, the plot of which figures Beckett's own half-hearted capitulation to commercial viability in the face of chronic unemployment. It finds that there is an inner connection between Freud's equilibrium-model of desire in relation to the "new", and the increasingly contradictory requirements of Modernist aesthetics and economic viability in the mid-to-late 1930s. It argues that the desire for newness – or rather a certain resistance to old or existing objects, both erotic and economic – must be inflected by the anxiety of staying in one place, by the feeling that one must always go on. Raymond Williams has suggested that Modernism's 'forms lent themselves to cultural competition and the commercial interplay of obsolescence, with its shifts of schools, styles and fashions so essential to the market'.<sup>96</sup> But where the likes of Pound semi-inadvertently colluded in the logic of the marketplace, prioritising newness in an effort to counteract 'diminishing returns' of meaning on a zero-sum, equilibrium model, Beckett would charge onto ever more marginal lands, 'scorching the earth where his successor [...] would sow his crop', and cultivating an exponentially meagre product to 'grin[d] in our noses'.<sup>97</sup> Using Freud's discussion of the relationship between 'choice' and 'death' in the 'Theme of the Three Caskets' (1913), the chapter concludes that *Murphy*'s silly longing for the 'total permutability' of desire can be read as challenge to

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<sup>96</sup> Raymond Williams, 'When Was Modernism?', *New Left Review*, no. 175, May/June 1989, pp. 48-52, p. 51.

<sup>97</sup> '[G]rinding in our noses' is Harold Pinter's memorable phrase. '[S]corching the earth' is Hugh Kenner's. Pinter, "Samuel Beckett", in *Various Voices: Prose, Poetry, Politics* (New York: Grove Press, 1998), p. 55. Kenner, *Flaubert, Joyce and Beckett: The Stoic Comedians* (London: W. H. Allen, 1964), p. vxiii.

the solipsism of marginal utility theory, a regime of value that directly links ‘preference’ to the finitude of the scarcest resource of all, the individual ‘life’ (*Mu*, 62).<sup>98</sup>

The focus of chapter 2, ‘Black Markets / A Dialectic of Equilibrium in *Watt* and *Molloy*’, is the problem of Mr Knott’s dinner. Though the Knott household is said to be a closed system ‘to which nothing could be added’ and from which ‘nothing could be taken away’, the random variable of Knott’s appetite produces an instability that Watt, and *Watt*, attempt to correct for by rigging up a kind of market, incentivising the local population to ensure there is no leftover food or any other kind of unused byproduct or remainder, guaranteeing that the system is closed and everything that is produced is consumed (*Wa*, 111). However, Beckett finds that by positing a system like this, with an original imbalance that must be corrected, he has triggered a theoretically infinite expansion of people, dogs and indeed text. The chapter reads this peculiarity alongside some of Beckett’s comments to Thomas MacGreevy regarding his ideal compositional practice. Writing should be a ‘spontaneous combustion of the spirit’, he says in October 1932, ‘to compensate the pus & pain that threatens its economy’ (*LSB 1*, 134-5). The ‘poem’, he adds in September 1935, must be ‘useful in the depths, where demand and supply coincide, and the prayer is god’ (*LSB 1*, 274). What has happened, this chapter wonders, between *Murphy* and *Watt* for Beckett to turn so violently against this credo of ‘personal and aesthetic equilibrium’, as Mark Nixon puts it (Nixon 2011, 37)? Watt is a domestic servant, one of those “invisible hands” tasked, among other things, with balancing the books. But his attempt to ensure ‘demand and supply coincide’, in the case of Knott’s dinner, goes so monstrously wrong that he accidentally deduces ‘a thousand years’ of entrepreneurial inbreeding peasants (*Wa*, 88). Gone are the innocent days of Wylie’s ‘closed system’, where ‘the quantum of wantum’ could be relied upon not to ‘vary’ (*Mu*, 38-9). Knott’s system is an open one, for all of *Watt*’s

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<sup>98</sup> ‘What is my life but preference for the ginger biscuit?’, enquires Sasha Murphy (Beckett 1935b, 100), p. 100. Sigmund Freud, ‘The Theme of the Three Caskets’ (1913), in James Strachey (ed. and trans.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 12 (London: Vintage, 2001), p. 298.

professions to the contrary. Far from being the sublime of literary creativity, the logic of equilibrium is put to use churning out vast amounts of indifferent material in lieu of any real creative urge or inspiration. The chapter uses two variant passages to explore this change of heart in Beckett's conception of his writing: *Molloy's* coprophagic economy of Ballyba, where waste is not tolerated as waste, and *Watt's* obscene, orgiastic solution to the problem of Mr Knott's dinner, an 8,300-word continuation of the published text. It argues that Beckett's 'mourning' for spontaneity arises from a misplaced desire for aesthetic and personal equilibrium, an illusory poetic sweet-spot where 'demand and supply coincide'. It concludes that there were good historical reasons for Beckett to turn away from this credo of "natural" pre-established harmony, and towards a more commodious art of 'mess' and 'pre-established arbitrary' (Wa, 114).<sup>99</sup>

Chapter 3, 'Hating Beckett / The Unexchangeable', applies this psychoanalytic logic to work of the 'siege in the room'.<sup>100</sup> If the Beckett of the 1930s was 'in mourning' for poetic 'spontane[ity]', the unprecedentedly urgent work of the Four Novellas, written in less than a year, found its spontaneity in a belligerent kind of "mourning" for an audience-object that had, for more than fifteen years, refused to come out of 'inexistence' (*HII*, 121). The rage expressed at this virtual object – 'cunts like you', the narrator calls them in 'First Love' (1973) [1946] – is part of a disconcerting readerly economy that is like Freud's description of the 'economics' of ambivalence in 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1917).<sup>101</sup> The reader is put in something like the position of an 'unknown loss', an unmournable object that provokes ever greater intensities of love and hatred because it is not there to receive them. Melancholic 'self-abasement',

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<sup>99</sup> Tom Driver, 'Beckett by the Madeleine', *Columbia University Forum*, IV, 1961, p. 125.

<sup>100</sup> 'The siege in the room' is a phrase that first appeared in Deidre Bair's biography. It does not appear in Knowlson's *Damned to Fame*, but seems to be no dispute that Beckett referred to his creative surge after the war in these militaristic terms. Deidre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), p. 346.

<sup>101</sup> Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', trans. Shaun Whiteside, in Maud Ellmann and Adam Phillips (eds.), *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia* (London: Penguin Classics, 2005), p. 205.



characterised by identifying with persecutory figures, is everywhere in the Novellas; but the narrators are like people who are unable to start the real ‘work of melancholia’ (Freud 2005, 215). This requires a ‘substitute object’ ‘worthless’ enough to match the ego’s worthlessness, available to ‘denigrat[e] and, so to speak, kill’ instead of the ego, bringing the melancholia to an end (Freud 2005, 217). This chapter argues, first, that nothing is valueless enough in Beckett because nothing is more valuable than ‘unknown loss’; and second, that the supreme value of unknown loss constitutes a refusal of substitutions that plays out at a tropological level in *Molloy*, a text that short-circuits symbolic systems by bringing things and representations, referents and tropes, too close to one other. This is why Beckett’s work “goes dead” when theoretical metalanguages (like psychoanalysis) are imposed on it; it attracts ‘symbolic equation[s]’ that discharge the sublimatory energy involved in symbol formation, inducing a kind of aesthetic thanatosis on the texts’s side, and loosing vast amounts of anxiety and frustration on the reader’s.<sup>102</sup> If the problem of domination took the form, in *Murphy*, of objects of desire that are destroyed by being too familiarly possessed, this is about as far as the problem of domination can go in the other direction: the well-named ‘siege’ texts are attempting to destroy their objects out of inexistence. The chapter concludes that the pseudo-formalism of the post-war texts block even problematically autonomous readings, providing enough deictic markers are left in to disturb the reader. Beckett’s séance is not for the past, but for the future; and it is his refusal to accept any substitutions for that ‘unknown’, unlocatable loss that produces the ‘vaguen[ing]’ effects associated with his formalism.

Chapter 4, ‘Safe Words’, is about Beckett’s movement away from a post-war aesthetics of vagueness, where the referents have been ambiguated or expunged, and towards a post-post-war aesthetics of overdetermination, where a single name or conceit has a plurality of determinate referents. To begin with, this involves trying to

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<sup>102</sup> Hanna Segal, *Dream, Fantasy and Art* (London: Routledge, 1991), e.g. p. 26.

understand why Beckett would “aestheticise”, and indeed romantically universalise, the torturer-tortured relationship at a historical moment when that was the most ethically pressing concern on the political horizon. Does *How It Is* use torture as a metaphor for something else – say, the process of literary composition, as some critics have averred?<sup>103</sup> Does it suggest that physical torture is continuous with other forms of power asymmetry, in erotic relationships for example (‘wooer and wooed’), pedagogical ones (‘pedant and dunce’), or economic ones (‘our united net sufferings’) (*HII*, 185, 189)? What does it mean, in a context of real, political torture during the Algerian War, to render those unequal relationships incessantly reversible, so that the statement ‘what the fuck I quote does it matter who suffers’ stands as the text’s ethical climax (*HII*, 173)? Making use of David Lloyd’s Kantian reading of its ‘logic of substitution’, the chapter’s main line of argument is that *How It Is* makes more use of content, or ‘particularity’, in its ‘representation’ of torture that Lloyd gives him discredit for. It does this by piecing together neglected elements of context, using contemporary news reports and feminist history to show that, in *How It Is*, not all ‘potential object[s] of coerced speech’ are created equal (Lloyd 2010, 212). It finds that Beckett has mapped legal jargon about the torture scandal (“*pris les armes à la main*” or “PAM”) onto painful personal material (‘Pam’ or Pamela Mitchell) in a spiralling auto-critique of its own formal principle, exchangeability. It agrees with Lloyd that this principle is shown to subtend political torture and Marx’s concept of the universal equivalent, but it submits that it probably originates with patriarchal social violence, an insight given away by the text’s prepossession with oral sadism and, I suggest, tortured female fighters in the FLN. It concludes that, in a final twist of the Möbius strip, these three heterogeneous domains have themselves been made to seem interchangeable, resubordinating the text to economics at the seeming point of delivery from it.

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<sup>103</sup> E.g. Raymond Federman, “‘How It Is’: with Beckett’s Fiction’ [sic], *The French Review*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (Feb. 1965), pp. 459-468. Gary Adelman, ‘Torturer and Servant: Samuel Beckett’s *How It Is*’, *Journal of Modern Literature*, 25.1 (2001), pp. 81-90.

## **1: The Theme of the Five Biscuits / Murphy's 'Life-Strike' in the Modernist Marketplace.<sup>1</sup>**

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*As the consumer loses some of one commodity, he/she must receive more of another if satisfaction is to be maintained.*

- Graham Bannock and R. E. Baxter, *The Penguin Dictionary of Economics* (2011).<sup>2</sup>

*What is my life, but preference for the ginger biscuit?*

- Beckett, *Murphy* Notebook II (1935b).<sup>3</sup>

In the aftermath of the Great Depression, disagreements in economic theory hardened into two competing orthodoxies, each with specific allegiances in political economy of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. One of them, building on the work of Adam Smith, has been described as the “Walrasian paradigm”, named after the Swiss economist Léon Walras. Walras is credited with founding modern general equilibrium theory, a macroeconomic theory which states that, in the right conditions, supply and demand will converge on an ‘end-state equilibrium’ that deploys the economy’s resources with maximum efficiency.<sup>4</sup> Often bracketed with microeconomics under the heading “neoclassicism”, this paradigm was enthusiastically adopted by neoliberal governments in the 1980s, and continues to be regarded as a mainstream economic ideology today.

In *The Natural Origin of Economics* (2007), Margaret Schabas traces the neoclassical interest in equilibrium back to two achievements in the natural philosophy of the Enlightenment. One is Newtonian physics. Adam Smith described Newton’s system as one ‘whose parts are all more strictly connected together than those of any

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Murphy*, ed. J. C. C. Mays (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 2009), p. 146.

<sup>2</sup> Graham Bannock and R. E. Baxter, *The Penguin Dictionary of Economics* (London: Penguin, 2011), p. 72.

<sup>3</sup> Beckett, *Murphy* Notebook II’, MS 5517/2, Samuel Beckett Collection, University of Reading, p. 100.

<sup>4</sup> Ben Fine and Dimitris Milonakis, *From Political Economy to Economics: Method, the Social and the Historical in the Evolution of Economic Theory* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 100.

philosophical hypothesis'.<sup>5</sup> It is this unifying aspect that appealed to Smith's sensibility, suggesting to him that there are 'real chains' that 'bind together [nature's] several operations' (Smith 1989, 105). Schabas suggests that Smith based his system on the conviction that the economy, like nature, is demonstrably 'law governed', even if those laws happen to be invisible.<sup>6</sup> One of the laws that attracted Smith most, in this respect, was the law of gravity, which he explicitly compares to the market mechanism that ensures 'the prices of all commodities are continually gravitating' towards their 'natural price'; or what Smith's neoclassical descendants would call competitive equilibrium.<sup>7</sup> Smith was also influenced, up to a point, by Newton's mechanistic approach, which modelled the universe as a closed system of forces acting and reacting on one another; later Formalist economists have embraced and exaggerated this aspect of his thinking, 'pav[ing] the way for the ontologically atomistic-mechanistic pre-assumption of neoclassical economics', 'epitomised by general economic equilibrium'.<sup>8</sup>

The second achievement is Linnaeus's "oeconomy of nature". Linnaeus understood the planet's ecosystem as an orderly and hierarchical system, pre-arranged by 'the all-wise disposition of the Creator' such that all 'natural things' have been 'fitted to produce general ends, and reciprocal uses'.<sup>9</sup> Like Mr Knott's establishment in *Watt* (1953) [1945], this precludes waste:

Equilibrium was manifest both in the number of offspring per species and in the average life span of each. There was, simply put, no waste. All that was produced was consumed. (Schabas 2005, 31)

Schabas notes that Linnaeus's system, relying on a dogmatic belief in a pre-established coordination of natural means and ends, contributed to Smith's creed of 'Stoic

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<sup>5</sup> Adam Smith, *Essays in Philosophical Subjects*, ed. W. P. D. Wightman (Oxford, Clarendon, 1980), p. 104.

<sup>6</sup> Margaret Schabas, *The Natural Origins of Economics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 87-8.

<sup>7</sup> Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of The Wealth of Nations, Books I-III*, ed. Andrew Skinner (London: Penguin Classics, 1989), p. 160.

<sup>8</sup> Leonidas Montes, 'Adam Smith: Real Newtonian', in Alexander Dow and Sheila Dow (eds.), *A History of Scottish Economic Thought* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 111.

<sup>9</sup> Linnaeus, *Oeconomy of Nature*, ed. And trans. Benjamin Stillingfleet (Oxford Clarendon, 1977), p. 39.

theodicy'. Smith's economics is 'Stoic' because it does not overlook the element of trial in Linnaeus's natural equation, and it is a 'theodicy' because it relies on the belief that '[h]appiness and prosperity are the ends intended by our planner' (Schabas 2005, 98). The economic historian Jacob Viner emphasises the theological attributes of Smith's optimistic view of the market, writing that

the essence of Smith's doctrine is that Providence has so fashioned the constitution of external nature as to make its processes favourable to man, and has implanted ab initio in human nature such sentiments as would bring about [...] the happiness and welfare of mankind. [...] The harmony and beneficence to be perceived in the matter-of-fact processes of nature are the results of the design and intervention of a benevolent God.<sup>10</sup>

Adrian Pabst connects Smith's interest in the notion of 'harmony' to the theology of Gottfried Leibniz. In *Monadology* (1714), Leibniz argues that the universe is made up of innumerable 'monads', which are the 'simplest substance' and 'the true atoms of nature'.<sup>11</sup> These monads, Leibniz continues, 'have no windows through which anything may come in or go out' (Leibniz 2005, 47). Yet though they are discreet and hermetic, they are also 'fitted to each other in virtue of the pre-established harmony between all substances', which is 'regulat[ed]' by God to the end that 'among created things action and passivity are reciprocal' (Leibniz 2005, 55, 60). *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) is a 'market theodicy', Pabst says, because its description of the relationship between atomised, self-interested economic actors and a harmonious, self-regulating market economy is structurally akin to Leibniz's universe of self-harmonising monads.<sup>12</sup> It is a "theodicy" because, like Leibniz's "best of all possible worlds" hypothesis, it depends on an active, interventionist God. This is what secular accounts of Smith's market mechanism miss out. Smith 'embraced [...] the idea of a "natural order of things" in

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<sup>10</sup> Jacob Viner, 'The Life of Adam Smith', in John Cunningham Wood (ed.), *Adam Smith: Critical Assessments* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 146.

<sup>11</sup> Gottfried Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics and Monadology*, trans. George R. Montgomery (New York: Dover Publications, 2005), p. 47.

<sup>12</sup> Adrian Pabst, 'From Civil to Political Economy: Adam Smith's Theological Debt', in Paul Oslington (ed.), *Adam Smith as Theologian* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 116.

which divine providential intervention – in the form of the “invisible hand of the market” – helps actualise the world’s highest possibilities’ (Pabst 2011, 117).

The second orthodoxy, established by John Maynard Keynes, follows in the footsteps of Thomas Malthus. In his *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1999) [1798], Malthus claimed that while agricultural output might, under the most favourable circumstances, increase in an arithmetic series (1, 2, 3, 4...), population will grow more quickly in a geometric series (1, 2, 4, 8...).<sup>13</sup> If population growth is not controlled by ‘preventative checks’ such as delayed marriage and ‘moral restraint’, i.e. having fewer children, it would be controlled by ‘positive checks’, Malthus’s euphemism for infant mortality, disease and famine (Malthus 1999, 32). Though Malthus, an Anglican priest, attempts to make the case for a benign, all-powerful deity behind this decidedly unharmonious arrangement, the best he can manage is a presciently anti-welfarist screed that blends the Book of Job with a kind of ethical eugenics. ‘Evil’, he writes, ‘exists in the world not to create despair, but activity’ (Malthus 1999, 158). Suffering is built into the system to encourage us to ‘people’ the earth, not with the Calibans of an ‘unhealthy, vicious and miserable’ population, but with a ‘healthy, virtuous and happy’ one.<sup>14</sup> Switching instructively to the language of government, since he has really been arguing at this register throughout, Malthus heatedly concludes that ‘we have no right to impeach the justice of the command, but our irrational mode of executing it’ (Malthus 1970, 445). Like the Department for Work and Pensions, God wants us to live up to his perfect design, but he won’t help us if we won’t help ourselves.

In a 1933 essay, Keynes bemoaned that it was Smith and his followers, rather than Malthus, who were the ‘parent stem’ of modern economics, because Malthus was a pessimist and a sceptic.<sup>15</sup> Importantly, his population principle led him to distrust the

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<sup>13</sup> Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, ed. Geoffrey Gilbert (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 30-2.

<sup>14</sup> Malthus, ‘Appendix’, in Anthony Flew (ed.), *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, 6th Ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1970), pp. 444-5.

<sup>15</sup> John Maynard Keynes, *Essays in Biography* (New York: Norton, 1963), p. 120.

belief that equilibrium could produce, through autonomous natural mechanisms, the best of all possible distributions. Malthus anticipated Keynes's key refutation of Say's Law in *The General Theory* (1936), a law that states the economy is a closed system in which 'supply creates its own demand', because 'products are paid for by products'.<sup>16</sup> Keynes rejected this idea on the grounds that equilibrium is a cognitive or merely theoretic tendency rather than a reflection of any empirical regulatory function in the economy. This stance is a form of epistemic realism, a wariness of assumptions about the availability of knowledge. Keynes, who studied under the then Neo-Hegelian philosopher G.E. Moore and whose first public talk was on Kant and freedom, is essentially accusing everyone in 'the hundred years past' of idealism (Keynes 2008, 3).<sup>17</sup> The 'general' assumption of equilibrium is, he writes, 'misleading and disastrous if we attempt to apply it to the facts of experience', rather than starting with 'the economic society in which we actually live' and making a posteriori claims about it (Keynes 2008, 30). As the Great Depression showed, a catastrophic shortfall in 'aggregate demand' can exist in conditions of near full employment, i.e. a state of supposed equilibrium, that the 'classical theory' rules out (Keynes 2008, 3). There will always be some remainder, some imbalance in the system or some unknown in the model, that the assumption of equilibrium overlooks. The problem of Mr Knott's leftovers, which I discuss in the next chapter, is a sustained attack on this kind of economic idealism.

Malthus's friend, David Ricardo, is usually credited with providing the link between Adam Smith and modern, mathematical economics (Fine and Milonakis 2009, 22). Keynes disliked him for this reason, and because his 'head [was] in the clouds' of 'abstraction' (Keynes 1963, 116-7). Ricardo's most famous abstraction is his theory of

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<sup>16</sup> This is named after the French economist J. B. Say. The way that Keynes puts it is: 'the aggregate demand price of output as a whole is equal to its aggregate supply price for all volumes of output'. John Maynard Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, in Elizabeth Johnson (ed.), *The Collected Writings of John Maynard Keynes*, VII (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 24-6.

<sup>17</sup> Giles Dostaler, *Keynes and His Battles*, trans. Niall B. Mann (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2007), p. 86.

rent. Some hundred years before him, the Franco-Irish economist Richard Cantillon had argued that everything can be divided by land, since the value of a commodity is determined by the cost of its production, and the cost of production can be expressed in terms of the land required to sustain workers and their dependents.<sup>18</sup> Ricardo used this model to analyse how the finitude and composition of any resource affects the accumulation of capital, and therefore also the profit rate across the economy as a whole. This has since been called “the corn model”, after his accurately titled *Essay on the Influence of a Low Price of Corn on the Profits of Stock* (1815). Ricardo begins by noting that, like land, investments are not created equal; some are more productive than others.<sup>19</sup> If the investment is corn, capital will be invested in the most productive corn-producing land first, then the next most productive, then the next most, and so on, up to a precise point. This is determined by population size and the profitability of “marginal” land. As the population grows, more and more land will be cultivated, with the most productive first. This means that, as the population increases, the profitability of the land being cultivated decreases, because capital seeks out the highest yield on its investment, and each new plot of land being cultivated is less fertile than the previous one. With more and more land being cultivated, the profit rate will eventually reach zero, a predicament Ricardo called ‘the stationary state’ (Ricardo 1951, 22).

Technological developments, working against the finitude of planetary resources, have prevented this from occurring for the time being.

As I discussed in the introduction, a new, subjective theory of value appeared at the same time in England, Austria and Switzerland in the early 1870s. Based on Ricardo’s corn model, it has come to be known as “Marginalism”. In England, Marginalism was a

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<sup>18</sup> Richard Cantillon, *Essay on the Nature of Trade in General: A Variorum Edition*, ed. Richard van den Berg, Trans. Henry Hicks (London: Routledge, 2015 [c. 1730]). Steven G. Medema and Warren J. Samuels, *The History of Economic Thought: A Reader*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 89.

<sup>19</sup> David Ricardo, *An Essay on the Influence of a Low Price of Corn on the Profits of Stock*, in *The Works and Correspondence of D. Ricardo*, Vol. IV, ed. P. Sraffa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), pp. 10-41. I have been helped in this summary by Duncan Foley, *Adam’s Fallacy: A Guide to Economic Theology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 70-81.



reaction to a series of crises of “overproduction” beginning in the 1860s, triggered by technological advancements, deflationary wages and the development of financial markets.<sup>20</sup> The cause of its appearance in Austria and Switzerland is more puzzling. As Mark Blaug points out,

[t]he levels of economic development in England, Austria and Switzerland were so different in the 1860s that all crypto-Marxist explanations in terms of changes in the structure of production or the relationship between social classes strain our sense of credulity.<sup>21</sup>

That said, Blaug continues, the fact that three people arrived at the same concept independently at the same time ‘cries out for some sort of historical explanation’ (Blaug 1984, 27). Marginalism regards scarcity as a problem of consumption rather than production. Existing theories of value, which linked the value of commodities to the value of productive factors (land, labour, technology) in manufacturing, were unable to explain the shortage of demand, so economists turned their attention to the relationship between the commodity and the consumer instead. In *Economic Theory of the Leisure Class* (1927), Nikolai Bukharin argues that Marginalism arose from this newfound interest in the ‘psychology of the consumer’; a psychology, he argues, that is ‘characteristic of the rentier’, i.e. a Ricardian landowner calculating the best use of his marginal lands.<sup>22</sup> It would be impossible to prove this empirically, but the argument is intuitively persuasive. Blaug weighs up a number of potential causes, the most striking one being that a ‘renaissance in Kantian philosophy around the middle of the century’ led to a greater emphasis on ‘introspection and sense-impression’ (Blaug 1984, 27). This “intellectual climate” argument is supported by the eerie similarities between

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<sup>20</sup> Regenia Gagnier, *The Insatiability of Human Wants: Economics and Aesthetics in Market Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 1-4.

<sup>21</sup> Mark Blaug, *Economic Theory in Retrospect*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 294, pp. 300-1. Bukharin, *Economic Theory of the Leisure Class*, trans. Ted Crawford (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), p. 27.

<sup>22</sup> Nikolai Bukharin, *Economic Theory of the Leisure Class*, trans. Ted Crawford (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), p. 27.

Marginalism and Schopenhauer's mechanistic, almost solipsistically subjective conception of desire, as we will see in a moment.

The subjective turn of Marginalism presented some theoretical problems for economists. If value is 'nothing inherent in goods', as Carl Menger says in *Principles of Economics* (1871), how do we measure it?<sup>23</sup> What kind of 'calculus', to take Bentham's word, could be used to objectively quantify something as inscrutable as 'the importance that we first attribute to the satisfaction of our needs, that is, to our lives and well-being' (Menger 2007, 116)? A little-known British economist, William Stanley Jevons, was one of the three people to hit on the lasting workaround in 1871. The 'first proposition' of his theory is that 'the satisfaction of every lower want in the scale creates a desire of a higher character'.<sup>24</sup> When a need or wish is fulfilled, another one pops up somewhere else, like a game of Whack-a-Mole, but in a reassuringly Victorian hierarchy. A 'full supply of ordinary food not only excites to delicacy in eating, but awakens attention to clothing' and other new wants (Jevons 1970, 51). This is some Arnoldian cover for the unavoidable implication that desire in Jevons's model moves mechanically from one object to the next with no reference to their moral qualities.<sup>25</sup> Desire can only ever be displaced in this Newtonian, mechanical system, because the sum of satisfactions is a constant in a closed system. Here is how Jevons's puts it, quoting Alexander Bain, in his *Theory of Political Economy* (1871):

[n]ow the mind of an individual is the balance which makes its own comparisons, and is the final judge of quantities of feeling. As Mr. Bain says, "It is only an identical proposition to affirm that the greatest of two pleasures, or what appears such, sways

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<sup>23</sup> Carl Menger, *Principles of Economics*, trans. James Dingwall and Bert F. Hoselitz (Auburn, AL: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2007), p. 116.

<sup>24</sup> William Stanley Jevons, *The Theory of Political Economy*, ed. R. D. Collison (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 50.

<sup>25</sup> Freud will come up with a "scientific" reason for 'libidinal energy' to seek out 'higher [...] aims', but it is not wholly convincing, as chapter 3 discusses. Sigmund Freud, 'Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria' ['Dora'] (1905) [1901], in James Strachey (ed. and trans.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 7 (London: Vintage, 2001), p. 50.

the resulting action; for it is this resulting action that alone determines which is the greater". (Jevons 1970, 19)<sup>26</sup>

Jevons takes an individual consumer with 'two pleasures' to choose between as his model. The greater pleasure will have been the one that was chosen, providing an empirical point of reference. Whenever a new choice is made, it will have been because one pleasure was preferred over another. This model can be plotted on a graph called an "indifference curve":

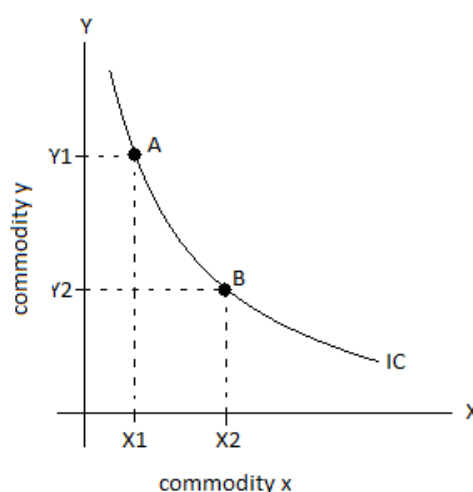


Fig. 1. Indifference curve.<sup>27</sup>

The first indifference curve appears in *Mathematical Psychics* (1881) by Francis Ysidro Edgeworth.<sup>28</sup> It is known as an "indifference curve" because it describes the points at which a consumer is (or strictly speaking, has been) "indifferent" to the substitution of one commodity for another. This dualism allowed Jevons to develop his 'calculus' of subjective value without reference to units. If there are only two elements to consider, there is no need to give them a numerical value:

[m]any readers may, even after reading the preceding remarks, consider it quite impossible to create such a calculus as is here contemplated, because we have no means of defining and measuring quantities of feeling, like we can measure a mile, or a right angle, or any other physical quantity. I have granted that we can hardly

<sup>26</sup> The quotation is from Alexander Bain, *The Emotions and the Will*, 1st ed. (New York: Appleton, 1865), p. 447.

<sup>27</sup> 'Indifference Curve', *Wikimedia Commons*, Web, 18 March 2017.

<sup>28</sup> Francis Ysidro Edgeworth, *Mathematical Psychics: An Essay on the Application of Mathematics to the Moral Sciences* (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1881), p. 36.

form the conception of a unit of pleasure or pain, so that the numerical expression of quantities of feeling seems to be out of the question. But we only employ units of measurement in other things to facilitate the comparison of quantities; and if we can compare the quantities directly, we do not need the units. (Jevons 1970, 18-9)

This is the theory of marginal utility. It combines Ricardo's theory of rent, where the least productive ("marginal") operative resource sets the profit rate across the economy of the whole, with a utilitarian, subjective theory of value. For a Marginalist, all exchange takes place at the final or "marginal" unit, when the subjective value of one thing has declined to the point that another thing would be preferred. For example, the consumer would exchange commodity Y for commodity X at point "A" on the graph above. ("B" could be another consumer, or another point at which the first consumer would consent to the exchange.) No reference to a 'unit of pleasure or pain' is necessary, because the theory does not seek to provide a rationale for the exchange. It only describes the ratio between X and Y, this much of one for that much of the other, at the moment that the exchange takes place.

In *Murphy* (1938), an academic turned illegal bookmaker says this to console his lascivious friend:

"I greatly fear," said Wylie, "that the syndrome known as life is too diffuse to admit of palliation. For every symptom that is eased, another is made worse. The horse leech's daughter is a closed system. Her quantum of wantum cannot vary." [...]

"Humanity is a well with two buckets," said Wylie, "one going down to be filled, the other coming up to be emptied." (*Mu*, 38-9).

*Murphy* is a novel in which a cast of 'puppet[s]' obligingly corroborate this theory of value, 'scratch[ing] [themselves] out of one itch and into another' (*Mu*, 123). Critics have attributed Beckett's interest in the mechanics of desire to a range of sources and ideas that he encountered in his omnivorous reading in the early 1930s. In *Demented Particulars: The Annotated Murphy* (2008), Chris Ackerley detects the influence of Newton's third law of motion, Proverbs and John Marston's *The Malcontent*, among several others (1603). Wylie takes his buckets almost verbatim from Marston: '[d]id you ere see a well with two buckets, whilst one comes up full to be emptied, another

goes down empty to be filled? Such is the state of all humanity'.<sup>29</sup> The 'horse leech's daughter' comes from Proverbs 30:15, where it is an image of insatiability. Ackerley notes that leeches can consume three times their bodyweight in blood, and the 'daughter' purportedly refers to 'greed' or to one of 'the bilingual blood-sucking disks at the disk of the head' of the leech (Ackerley 2010, 78). Murphy is described as 'Newtonian' by Ackerley because 'he equates Newton's third law of motion' – that every action must have an equal and opposite reaction – with the horseleech's daughter, 'to the effect that for every itch is satisfied another is created' (Ackerley 2010, 171). This leads Ackerley to Schopenhauer's pessimistic account of desire; and he concludes that 'Murphy's genius, reduced to its simplest terms, is to acknowledge the principles of pessimism' (Ackerley 2010, 171).<sup>30</sup>

In Volume 1 of *The World as Will and Presentation* (1818), Schopenhauer describes the 'will' as an imperishable motive force that is 'objectified' in all phenomenal things.<sup>31</sup> The will is infinite and goes on 'forever', but it is also what animates individual organisms through the '*principium individuationis*' (Schopenhauer 2008, 153). This is supposedly why desire is 'endless' and 'satisfaction' is not satisfying (Schopenhauer 2008, 253).<sup>32</sup> 'No attained object of desire can give lasting satisfaction, but merely a fleeting gratification', Schopenhauer sulks; it is 'like alms that keep the beggar living for today, so that tomorrow he may again go hungry' (Schopenhauer 1909, 253). Wylie's conclusions might be less stropky and bleak, but they come down to the same thing: 'every satisfied wish at once makes room for a new one' (Schopenhauer 1909, 253).

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<sup>29</sup> Ackerley, *Demented Particulars: The Annotated Murphy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 80.

<sup>30</sup> Though Ackerley describes Murphy's genius as pessimistic, it is in fact Neary who is called 'Newtonian' (*Mu*, 125). Murphy himself is said to prefer the mental 'tumult of non-Newtonian motion' (*Mu*, 72).

<sup>31</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Presentation*, Vol 1, trans. Richard E. Aquila (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 171.

<sup>32</sup> As I mention in a footnote in the introduction, I have generally used Richard E. Aquila's translation of Schopenhauer rather than that of R. B. Haldane and J. Kemp. An exception has been made here because the latter is much funnier in this passage. Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, Vol. I, 7<sup>th</sup> ed., trans. R. B. Haldane and J. Kemp (London: Kegan Paul, 1909), p. 253-4.

They are both Marginalist because they regard desire and value as fleeting, subjective, and dualistic: one bucket rises as the other bucket falls, but the quantum of wantum does not vary. Or as Jevons puts it, ‘human wants are more less quickly satiated’, and ‘the greatest of two pleasures, or what appears such, sways the resulting action’ (Jevons 1970, 24, 19).

In Beckett’s 1956 play, *Act Without Words II*, two figures are prodded awake and mime their morning routines. “A” crawls out of his sack with the utmost reluctance, scoffing pills and praying for strength ([h]e is a moper, a hypochondriacal dream, perhaps a poet’).<sup>33</sup> The theory of marginal utility only applies to him in a negative sense, as we will see. “B”, by extreme contrast, leaps out of his sack, checks his watch and performs a vigorous exercise routine. He has done this, Marginalism says, because the marginal utility of sleeping for another minute has decreased to a point of equilibrium with the marginal utility of getting up and doing calisthenics. According to the theory of marginal utility, every decision is taken on this declining curve of satisfactions, from the most trivial to the most profoundly life-affecting. When there are more than two things to choose between, they are divided into “bundles”, so there are only ever two choices: the thing or things that were chosen, and the thing or things that were not. It follows from this that the Marginalist consumer is always swapping what they have for what they don’t. Whatever they choose, they are either choosing to carry on as they are with their current “bundle” (money, time, cathexes, etc.), or to swap some or all of it for something else (this money for that carrot, this time sleeping for that time doing calisthenics). They do this because they have “budget constraints”: finite amounts of things like time and money.

In the first *Murphy* notebook (1935), Murphy wonders: ‘[w]hat is my life but preference for the ginger biscuit?’ It is an aptly rhetorical question, because ‘preference’

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<sup>33</sup> Beckett, *Act Without Words II*, in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Dramatic Works*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 2006), p. 207.

is a pre-echo of the ultimate budget constraint, the finitude of the human lifespan. In 'The Theme of the Three Caskets' (1913), Sigmund Freud shows that every exclusive choice is made in the light of this finitude. There are, Freud notices, a preponderance of stories and myths in which protagonists are obliged to choose between three people or objects standing for people, with the humblest choice being rewarded and the greedy choice being punished.<sup>34</sup> Bassanio wins Portia's hand in *The Merchant of Venice* (1600) because he chooses a lead casket over the gold and silver ones, the humble choice supposedly indicating that he values deeper, soberer qualities instead of meretricious things like commodities with high exchange-value (Freud 1913, 290). King Lear chooses to turn his kingdom over to Goneril and Regan because Cordelia refuses to match their fawning platitudes, and this vain choice is punished by their tyrannical ingratitude and Cordelia's death (Freud 1913, 291-2). Moving through a number of sources from myth and folklore, Freud notes that the humble option is often characterised by pallor or muteness, which he associates with death. He concludes that these stories are 'wishful reversal[s]' in which '[c]hoice stands in the place of necessity, destiny', i.e. death (Freud 1913, 298). For Freud, choice is a way of mastering death by voluntarily encountering it in homeopathic doses. 'A choice is made where in reality there is obedience to a compulsion; and what is chosen is not a figure of terror, but the fairest and most desirable of women' (Freud 1913, 298). Or, in Murphy's case, biscuits:

He took the biscuits carefully out of the packet and laid them face upward on the grass, in order as he felt of edibility. They were the same as always, a Ginger, an Osborne, a Digestive, a Petit Beurre and one anonymous. He always ate the first-named last, because he liked it the best, and the anonymous first, because he thought it very likely the least palatable. The order in which he ate the remaining three was indifferent to him and varied irregularly from day to day. (*Mu*, 62)

Murphy already has his biscuits, and he will eat them all, interruptions notwithstanding. He does not have to choose to *not* have any of them, as he would if his budget constraint were biscuits, or the money to buy them. He has accepted that this is

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<sup>34</sup> Freud, 'The Theme of the Three Caskets' (1913), in James Strachey (ed. and trans.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 12* (London: Vintage, 2001), p. 290.

his lot. The market has cleared, the time for exchange-value is over. It is just Murphy alone with his use-values now. What he chooses to do with them is both familiar and deeply weird. He artificially creates a situation in which he has to choose between the five.<sup>35</sup> This is not the same as saying that he does not, in some prior sense, “prefer” the ginger biscuit. He can prefer the ginger biscuit and eat it whenever he wants, because, *qua* biscuits, he is not constrained by finite time or money. He already has the biscuits and, he assumes, enough life left to eat them in. But he chooses to create a predicament in which preference must be asserted. He does this by setting out a limited period of time in which to eat them. He is creating artificial scarcity, the “budget constraint” of time, so that he can play out a situation where he will have to take decisions in accordance with the principle of marginal utility. He has ranked his desiderata in order of preference, as if he was standing in a shop with a budget constraint, mulling over which thing to choose instead of the others. He has even helpfully illustrated the practice of “bundling”, grouping the four biscuits together so that there are only two choices: the thing he will choose, and the thing(s) he will virtually not choose.

Incidentally, the ‘anonymous’ biscuit gets special consideration on the grounds of marginal *dis*utility. Marginal disutility plays a part in decision-making when something is actively undesirable in a given context. Imagine the graph of the indifference curve upside-down. When ‘B’ gets up in *Act Without Words II*, it looks like it is because the marginal disutility of being stabbed with the ‘goad’ has increased to a point of equilibrium with the marginal disutility of having to be awake, which is why he reluctantly gets up (*AWW II*, 209). Marginal disutility is just as important, if not more, than marginal utility in everyday decision-making, especially with regard to employment.

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<sup>35</sup> Five, perhaps not coincidentally, is the number of people who Murphy is ‘needed by’ at the climax of the novel (*Mu*, 126).



Now, having made a little model of life's market, where there are this many things and a finite time to use them, Murphy should rationally eat his favourite biscuit first, lest he die having only sampled the middling ones. Why would he risk any other order? Because, of course, the chances of him expiring in the next five minutes are relatively slender. Life is an *unknowable* finite "budget constraint", and lunch is generally not. This allows Murphy to play around with life and death, or biscuits, in a virtual environment. He can engage in brinkmanship with his mortality, saving the best till last, safe in the knowledge that the principle of marginal utility need not apply (but playfully does, in reverse order).

The plot and themes of *Murphy* work through some of the consequences of this logic of value. The novel even links it, subtly but specifically, to the context in which it was written. *Murphy* is, at blurb level, the story of a passionately inert young man who is cajoled by his sex-worker girlfriend into fulfilling the expectation of obtaining a respectable profession, before taking a psychotic as a role-model at his new workplace and terminally dissociating himself in a gas explosion. As an Irish migrant feigning to look for work in London and facing increasing pressure to do so in earnest, Beckett himself was in a similar predicament to his desultory protagonist in the years 1933-35, as Lois Gordon and Andrew Gibson have noted.<sup>36</sup> Taking a less biographical tack, John Bolin has argued that *Murphy* is 'an ironic metafiction', though this is an understanding that has gone missing on all but 'very few readers'.<sup>37</sup> If that is true aesthetically then it is also masochistically close to home, curving back on the circumstances in which it was written like a Möbius strip. Biographically, Beckett's mother was the principle source of cajolement about his employment status (as well as that of financial support), a flagrant and short-circuitingly psychoanalytic substitution;

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<sup>36</sup> Andrew Gibson, *Samuel Beckett: Critical Lives* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2010), p. 64. Lois Gordon, *The World of Samuel Beckett, 1906-1946* (London: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 93.

<sup>37</sup> John Bolin, *Beckett and the Modern Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 45.

and the job he was really in the market for was the authorship of *Murphy* itself. Since the book ends with the protagonist aspiring to a psychotic detachment from the world of employment before being killed off, it may be more helpful to describe the novel's metafictional qualities in terms of a genre which makes use of both aesthetic and biographical elements reciprocally. Joyce's first published novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), is a playfully explicit definition of the *Künstlerroman*. It would make sense for Beckett to fly from his Modernist precursor to the opposite end of the spectrum. *Murphy*, then, might be understood as a kind of "anti-*Künstlerroman*": a performative repudiation of an aesthetic stance which the writer was obliged to give up as untenable or inauthentic, in the same generic subcategory as something like Ezra Pound's 'Hugh Selwyn Mauberley' (1920). This in-built repudiation would have the intriguing corollary of making Beckett's first published novel a pre-emptive allegory for its own commercial and – in Beckett's judgement – aesthetic failure in the Modernist marketplace.

Several critics and philosophers have engaged with Modernism's relation to the market and to economics in general. In *Aesthetic Theory* (2013) [1970], Theodor Adorno baldly states that '[t]he new in art is the aesthetic counterpart to the expanding reproduction of capital in society', because 'both hold the promise of undiminished plenitude'.<sup>38</sup> But the unconditional 'autonomy' of 'modern art', which asserts itself through a special attention to 'the hardened and alienated' (Baudelaire is his example), means that it can 'surmount the heteronomous market' rather than reproducing its logic (Adorno 2013, 30).<sup>39</sup> Tim Armstrong points out that Adorno's position is problematically close in its insistence on art's autonomy to New Criticism, which interprets Modernism as aloof from political concerns rather than provocatively

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<sup>38</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, eds. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 31.

<sup>39</sup> Adorno is emphatic about this. '[A]rts autonomy remains irrevocable. All efforts to restore art by giving it a social function – of which art is itself uncertain and by which it expresses its own uncertainty – are doomed' (Adorno 2013, 1).

alienated.<sup>40</sup> Going even further, Jonathan Crary argues that any notion of critically autonomous Modernist art is misleading, because even the most trenchantly disinterested aesthetic philosophy bears the impression of material forces in the handiwork of its particular sanctuary from them. This is not the same thing as saying autonomous artworks are political because of that imprint; it is not an external link to the forces being eschewed or resisted. Crary is arguing that no Modernist artwork is autonomous, because its form of 'transcendence' will turn out to be 'inseparable' from those forces.<sup>41</sup> Crary takes the extreme case of Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer believed that subjective reality was an illusion but that an aesthetic form of 'entirely objective perception' was possible (Crary 1992, 77). For his noumenal realm to be objective, Schopenhauer had to argue that Kant's transcendental subject was an illusion. If it wasn't, perception of the noumenon would be mediated by the subject's categories (time, space, causality etc.), rather than being objective. So Schopenhauer argues that this subject is a limited, unreliable biological entity, a bundle of deceptive drives and deadening repetitions. But that conception of the biological subject was informed by Schopenhauer's scientific reading, which focused on recent mechanistic theories that were themselves the product of changing material forces. Industrialisation demanded a rationalised, efficient workforce, and science provided conveniently mechanical accounts of workplace problems like attention and fatigue (Crary 1992, 79-84). Crary argues that Schopenhauer's 'utopia of aesthetic perception' – which Beckett once loved, and which contributed to Murphy's 'little world' of narcissistic anhedonia – is therefore also 'a retreat from the anguish of modernised world that was making the body into an apparatus of predictable reflex activity, outlined by the scientists whose work so fascinated him' (Crary 1992, 77-8; *Mu*, 6). Crary concludes from this that

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<sup>40</sup> Tim Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology, and the Body: A Cultural Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 4.

<sup>41</sup> Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (London: MIT Press, 1992), p. 85.

[a]ny effective account of modern culture must confront the ways in which Modernism, rather than being a reaction against or transcendence of processes of scientific and economic rationalisation, is inseparable from them. (Crary 1992, 85)

In *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981), Fredric Jameson finds a way to reconcile Crary's historicist position with Adorno's emphasis on autonomy and negativity. Jameson agrees with Crary that Modernism and economic rationality are inseparable, but believes that Modernism can still be described as a reaction to it.<sup>42</sup> Jameson agrees with Adorno that the reaction generally takes the form of a bid for autonomy or transcendence, but disagrees with him about whether it can succeed. For Jameson, every attempt at autonomy must be a failure because, whatever form it takes, economics will leave its mark on the attempt (Jameson 1981, 214). Joseph Conrad is his example. Conrad's work attacks 'rationalisation and reification in nineteenth-century capitalism' by adopting an impressionistic style (Jameson 1981, 213). Impressionism is the aesthetic counterpart of positivism, an epistemology that answered an economic need for standardisation. Positivism relies on repeatable experiments and presupposes a generic subject of knowledge receiving valid data through a reliable sensory apparatus. Impressionism shares that emphasis on sense data but interprets it in the opposite way. Sensory experience is paramount not because it is universally available, but because it is absolutely subjective. Daydreaming and hallucination are as valid as any consensus of perception, so positivism has been resisted along with the economic rationality behind it (Jameson 1981, 213-4). But economics still manages to leave its mark on Conrad's 'projected solution', because impressionism has succumbed to bourgeois individualism by retreating into this sovereign subject of perception. Art has asserted its autonomy in the face of economic necessity, but the form of assertion is shaped by market rationality (Jameson 1981, 214).

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<sup>42</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Routledge, 1981), p. 213.

Whether Modernist writers resistantly mimicked market principles, as Adorno thinks, or whether they productively failed to transcend them through ‘projected solutions’, several prominent Modernist figures were much less resistant to market principles when it came to publicising and distributing their work. In *Modernism, the Market and the Institution of the New* (2009), Rod Rosenquist shows how some first-generation Modernist writers were involved ‘in the active manipulation of public opinion or institutional and cultural histories in order to ensure the best reception of their work by both contemporary readers and future literary historians alike’.<sup>43</sup> Joyce was especially savvy in marketing and controlling the reception of his work, while Pound prided himself on distributing and advertising the work of others. Pound also had at least one eye on future audiences and wanted to fashion taste to ensure the longevity of Modernist artworks. To this end, he would act as a critic and literary historian as well as a poet, establishing new criteria of literary value before writing to order (Rosenquist 2009, 8-9). Similarly, Joyce lobbied Ford Maddox Ford and others to review *Ulysses* (1922) favourably, and even planted gushing reviews, or at least scripted parts of them; he wrote to Harriet Shaw Weaver on the 25 November 1922 that ‘[i]t seems to me I wrote most of [the reviews] so far – I mean I see my own phrases rolling back to me’ (Rosenquist 2009, 5).<sup>44</sup> Joyce also encouraged T. S. Eliot to sloganise on his behalf, writing to Weaver that ‘I shall suggest to [T. S. Eliot] when I write to him to thank him that in alluding to [*Ulysses*] elsewhere he use or coin some short phrase, two or three words’ for the English market (Rosenquist 2009, 6). Rosenquist suggests that, such was the degree of influence exerted by them over their reception, Modernists like Joyce and Pound may have contributed to an exaggerated impression of newness that their work does not necessarily bear out.

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<sup>43</sup> Rod Rosenquist, *Modernism, the Market and the Institution of the New* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 5.

<sup>44</sup> Stuart Gilbert and Richard Ellmann (eds.), *The Letters of James Joyce, Vol III* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957-1966), p. 69.

If Pound's generation showed impressive economic nous in manipulating the market to its advantage, later Modernists needed a comparably sophisticated understanding of their economic situation in order to flourish. With an apparently dwindling stock of new formal resources and subject matters, their predicament arose because of the demand for perennial newness was unsustainable, in the specifically economic context of scarce aesthetic means with alternative uses (i.e. different writers and texts). The options were limited for Modernist latecomers, as Rosenquist writes:

a large number of Modernist latecomers who wrote from a position aware of the high Modernist tradition had to choose between either joining the already existing movement, or finding some way to subvert or actively oppose those who had already made their mark, even if neither incorporation nor opposition to the dominant modernists appealed to the new candidate. (Rosenquist 2009, 21)

Does the Modernist latecomer try to shoulder their way into an already overcrowded tradition, accepting the impossible demand for incessant renewal? Do they stick with what they have at their disposal, reformulating earlier innovations? Or do they try to somehow out-new newness, subverting its premises or challenging its logic from within?

Rosenquist doesn't engage with Beckett in his study, but this was his exactly his predicament in the 1930s. Rosenquist's use of 'candidate' here is telling, bearing in mind the plot of *Murphy* and the lacklustre CV that Beckett had under his belt when he put pen to paper on September 5<sup>th</sup> in 1935, beginning "Sasha Murphy". Beckett's resignation from his lectureship at Trinity College Dublin during the Christmas break of 1931 was the beginning of a prodigious unemployment history. This lasted some twenty-two years, coming to end with the international success of *Waiting for Godot* (1953) [1948] and the financial independence, still principally from maternal handouts, that it at last afforded. During the Thirties, Beckett applied for or considered positions as a French teacher in Southern Rhodesia (13/9/32); an assistant at the National Gallery (4/11/32); a job 'licking stamps' for Beckett and Metcalfe, the quantity surveying firm run by Frank Beckett after their father's death in June 1933 (5/3/36); an

apprentice to filmmaker Serge Eisenstein at the Moscow Institute for Cinematography (25/3/36); an airline pilot (26/7/36); a lecturer in French at the University of Cape Town (14/8/37); and a London-based advertising copywriter.<sup>45</sup> What this eccentric list of Beckett's abandoned work demonstrates is that he was frantically uncertain, both before and during the composition of *Murphy*, about his chances and abilities as a professional writer in the inclement economic and aesthetic conditions of Thirties Modernism, as well as his anxious relationship to the idea of employment in general. Beckett once confessed to James Knowlson that he only decided to become a writer because he hated being an academic and did not know what else he could do.<sup>46</sup> After the failures of *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* [1932] (1992), *More Pricks than Kicks* (1934), and *Echo's Bones and Other Precipitates* (1935), it is no wonder that unemployment becomes a central preoccupation of Beckett's oeuvre.

In a letter to Thomas MacGreevy of June 1936, Beckett gives his verdict on the novel he was 2000 words from finishing. '*Murphy* is really a most unsavoury & not very honest work. I am not sure that Chatto's are so unlikely to take it' (*LSB 1*, 337). Aesthetic and market values are sufficiently antithetical, in Beckett's view, that he hopes *Murphy*'s shortcomings will work in its favour. Chatto and Windus's Ian Parsons agreed with Beckett about the market, but not about the shortcomings. Parsons declined *Murphy* the following month, but he took the time to write to Beckett, chummily scoffing at the idiocy of his customers:

The novel racket has reached such a pass today that a book, such as yours, which makes real demands on the reader's intelligence and general knowledge has less chance than ever of gaining a hearing. (*LSB 1*, 357)

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<sup>45</sup> Beckett, *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Vol 1, 1929-1940*, eds. George Craig, Martha Dow Fehsenfeld, Dan Gunn and Lois More Overbeck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 121, 139, 320, 324, 362, 545. Deidre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), p. 172.

<sup>46</sup> Elizabeth Knowlson and James Knowlson, *Beckett Remembering/Remembering Beckett: A Centenary Celebration* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), p. 67.

It was gradually dawning on Beckett what this meant in “real terms”. Commercial considerations come first, aesthetic considerations come nowhere. ‘Heard from [publisher A. S.] Frere-Reeves yesterday’, he writes to McGreevy in July 1936, ‘a curt rejection. “On commercial grounds we could not justify it in our list.” And of course what other grounds of justification could there be’ (*LSB 1*, 365). Beckett seems faintly disappointed to have this suspicion confirmed, as if he had been misled. His insistence, in another letter to MacGreevy in November 1936, that the novel must be at least ‘slightly obscure’, with a narrative that is ‘deliberately’ ‘hard to follow’, indicates part of the problem. He was not prepared to abandon the “difficulty” criterion of Modernist fiction.<sup>47</sup> Chatto’s reader-report, which criticises the novel’s ‘frequent abstruse allusions’ and ‘generally somewhat recondite manner of writing’, suggest that Parsons’s oddly juridical comment was right: a novel such as *Murphy* had ‘less chance than ever of gaining a hearing’.

Beckett was, however, prepared to ‘expurgate’ the text, which he did over the course of the next year (*Mu*, 10, 32, 76). Three intricately-written pages on the mechanics of Murphy answering the telephone while lashed to his rocking-chair are cut to a mere two sentences, for example.<sup>48</sup> Beckett also takes the opportunity, on no fewer than three occasions in the published text, to parody the terms of the obligation: anecdotal subplots are to be ‘expurgated, accelerated, improved and reduced’ (*Mu*, 10, 32, 76). The listed imperatives, here, are reminiscent of both advertising jargon and manifesto Modernism, which was preoccupied by speed in its Futurist guise, and preoccupied

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<sup>47</sup> Beckett, ‘Excerpt from a Letter of November 13, 1936 to George Reavey’, in Ruby Cohn (ed.), *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment* (New York: Grove Press, 1983), p. 103.

<sup>48</sup> These were composed between the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 9<sup>th</sup> of September 1935. The first uncanceled page in the first notebook was written on the 5<sup>th</sup> of September, titled ‘Chapter 1. Introduction Murphy’. Much of this section, from the opening line down, appears in some form in the published text. There is no ‘big world’ / ‘little world’ distinction yet, however, and a neat portmanteau, ‘psychoendocrinologist’, does not make the final cut of Neary’s speech about Murphy’s ‘conarium’ (*Mu*, 6). ‘Beckett, ‘*Murphy* Notebook I’ [1935], MS 5517/1, Samuel Beckett Collection, University of Reading, pp. 45-8, 19, 39. Cf. Beckett, *Murphy*, p. 7. ‘Murphy could not free his hand...’



with economy in its Poundian one, as we will see.<sup>49</sup> However, despite the expurgations, another exasperated letter to MacGreevy show the negotiations with publishers dragging on into November 1937:

Houghton Mifflin are “on”, but screaming for a cut of one third! So the matter still pends, I not having refused blankly to change a syllable, but having replied with a polite request to be told how I was to remove more than I had already removed & leave a remained [for remainder]. (*LSB* 1, 388)

The impasse was finally broken when Routledge accepted the novel on the back of a recommendation from the painter Jack Yeats, who had not even seen the manuscript; 600 copies were sold before it went out of print in 1942, confirming everyone’s expectations.<sup>50</sup>

Started in August 1935, *Murphy*’s opening sentence is an open retort to Pound’s surprisingly belated invitation to “make it new”. *Make It New* was the title of a collection of literary essays, published in September 1934, which Beckett reviewed in the December edition of *The Bookman*. The expression ‘Make it new’ was used again by Pound in Canto LIII, written around 1940, and by T. S. Eliot in his 1968 introduction to Pound’s *Literary Essays*; it has since come to exemplify a certain view of Modernist writing.<sup>51</sup> Recent studies by Peter Gay and Susan Stanford Friedman, for example, have maintained the importance of Pound’s slogan to the practice and reception of Modernism. In *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy* (2008), a wide-ranging, historical account of Modernist art and architecture, Gay sums up that, ‘[i]n short, Modernists considered Ezra Pound’s famous injunction, ‘Make It New!’, a professional, almost a

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<sup>49</sup> E.g. Marinetti’s *Futurism and Fascism* (1924): ‘[o]nly a war can rejuvenate, accelerate, stimulate human intelligence...’ The Vorticists mocked Marinetti for his fetishisation of speed, calling it ‘automobilism’. I discuss Pound and economy below. The emphasis on improvement, as well as the tendency to list verbs, suggests advertising jargon. Filippo Marinetti, *Futurism and Fascism*, qtd. in Herbert W. Schneider, *Making the Fascist State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1928), p. 8.

<sup>50</sup> Raymond Federman and Lawrence Graver (eds.), *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1979), p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> Ezra Pound, *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1999), p. 265. Eliot, ‘Introduction’, in Eliot (ed.), *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1968), p. xii.

sacred obligation'.<sup>52</sup> Gay's summary seems to take Pound's slogan at face value, but the word 'sacred', as well as suggesting T. S. Eliot's *The Sacred Wood* (1921), is intended to clash with the title. 'Heresy' means 'the sheer act of successful insubordination against ruling authority', suggesting a blindly Oedipal rejection of anything that happens to exist already (Gay 2008, 4).<sup>53</sup> This characterisation might fit Zaum poetry, for example, which was content to chuck almost all vestiges of intelligibility overboard in the effort to exorcise the old, but most kinds of Modernism were alive to the contradiction suggested by Gay's title. A sacred commitment to heresy is a commitment to the tradition of making it new. In *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernity Across Time* (2015), Susan Stanford Friedman makes this contradiction central to her definition of Modernism. 'Modernism', she writes, 'requires tradition to "make it new"'. Tradition comes into being only as it is rebelled against. Definitional excursions into the meanings of modern, modernity, and Modernism begin and end in reading the specificities of these contradictions'.<sup>54</sup> There must, according to Friedman, be an "it" in existence to be rebelled against, and Modernist writers must be engrossed in the study of that 'it' to prevent it from being unthinkingly reproduced. The injunction to 'make it new' must be based on an awareness that, as Wyndham Lewis put it, the status quo will keep on 'imitating itself with an almost religious absence of originality' unless someone consciously intervenes to prevent it from doing so.<sup>55</sup> Instead of a blind Oedipal repudiation of the past, 'make it new' suggests a 20:20 attentiveness to its contradictions. It is only by strenuously understanding the past that any newness, on the model, not of the unprecedented, but of the advertising paradox "new and improved", can be achieved.

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<sup>52</sup> Peter Gay, *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy: From Baudelaire to Beckett and Beyond* (New York: Norton, 2008), p. 106.

<sup>53</sup> Gay, who also wrote *Freud: A Life for Our Time* (1988), avoids this connection. Beckett, I suggest, does not.

<sup>54</sup> Susan Stanford Friedman, *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernity Across Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), p. 46.

<sup>55</sup> Wyndham Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p. 15.

This summary has deliberately avoided making normative judgements about these accounts of Modernism. It also avoids providing any definitional excursions of its own. I am not concerned with what does and does not constitute Modernism from an aesthetic point of view, except insofar as certain broad categories, like “newness” or “difficulty”, are consistently connected with it. The precise aesthetic meaning of these terms matters less, for my argument, than the fact that their meaning is contested, making the connection with their counterparts in commerce and in economics generally so ambiguous. Beckett seems to be working out those connection at the level of value, and it is this that the chapter is concerned with.

Beckett’s review of *Make It New*, ‘Ex Cathezra’ (1934), is unusually merciful by his standards at the time, though its title gently ridicules Pound’s reputation for megalomaniacal dogmatism. In passing, Beckett superciliously notes that ‘only readers familiar with Mr Pound’s ABC’s of Reading and Economics [...] will appreciate [*Make It New*] thoroughly’, a rare instance of Beckett seeming to engage directly with a nominally economic text.<sup>56</sup> Funnily enough, he seems to be hoodwinking us: there is no evidence to suggest that he himself was one of Pound’s ‘familiar’ readers, though he was certainly eager to communicate his familiarity with his *ABC of Economics* (1933). Economics was on Modernism’s agenda, and Beckett was aware enough of some affinity between them to know that he should not plead ignorance.

Pound’s engagement with economics is well known.<sup>57</sup> He immersed himself in economic theory, especially monetary theory, becoming an outspoken supporter of C.H. Douglas’s idea of ‘social credit’ and a ferocious (if sometimes confused) opponent of finance capitalism (Nicholls 1984, 21). He also denounced the influence of economic imperatives on art, railing against ‘the gross idiocy of publishers’ and ‘their policy of

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<sup>56</sup> Beckett, ‘Ex Cathezra’, in *Disjecta*, p. 77.

<sup>57</sup> For a discussion of Pound’s engagement with economics in general, and of C. H. Douglas’s *Economic Democracy* (1920) in particular, see Peter Nicholls, *Ezra Pound: Politics, Economics and Writing* (London: Macmillan, 1984), pp. 20-30.

debasement of the literary coin'.<sup>58</sup> Yet he apparently saw little contradiction in allying his poetic theories to the same or similar imperatives he was denouncing in economics. 'In the culture of the mind, as in the culture of fields,' he writes, 'there is a law of diminishing returns'.<sup>59</sup> Diminishing returns of aesthetic value must be countermanded by 'efficiency', where this means the most direct, compressed form of expression that is possible in a given context; 'writing that is perfectly controlled', a hyperbolically managerial command of language; and, of course, by 'newness' of form and subject-matter, the technology and raw materials of cultural production.<sup>60</sup>

Newness is the driving force behind this array of capitalist imperatives, and Beckett's writing engages with a surprising number of them. Indeed, in a letter of June 1949, Beckett seems to surprise himself, 'taking advantage of a (passing) moment of lucidity' to declare 'once and for all' that 'we are still in a world of competition, of winning and losing', and deciding he favours the latter.<sup>61</sup> As Marx writes in the *Grundrisse* (1861), '[c]onceptually, *competition* is nothing but the *inner nature of capital*, its essential character', driving down the cost of labour on the supply-side, generating surplus value; and on the demand-side, spurring on producers to do outdo one another, obliging them to come up with new commodities and services or cheaper, more efficient ways to provide them.<sup>62</sup> This might be why, in the 1937 'German Letter' to Axel Kaun, Beckett decides that 'language is most efficiently used where it is efficiently misused': inefficiency is uncompetitive.<sup>63</sup> Pound first proclaimed the virtues of 'efficiency' in the 'Vorticist Manifesto' (1914), repeating it throughout his career in essays and letters. These include 'A Retrospect' (1918), which emphasises the idea of

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<sup>58</sup> Pound, 'Date Line', in *Literary Essays*, p. 81.

<sup>59</sup> Pound, 'I Gather the Limbs of Osiris', in Walter Sutton (ed.), *Ezra Pound: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1936), p. 30.

<sup>60</sup> Pound, 'Vorticist Manifesto', in *Blast: Review of the Great English Vortex, II* (New York: Kraus Reprints, 1967), p. 153.

<sup>61</sup> Beckett, *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Vol. 2, 1941-1956*, eds. George Craig, Martha Dow Fehsenfeld, Dan Gunn and Lois More Overbeck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 166.

<sup>62</sup> Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, in *Collected Works Vol 28, 1857-1861*, trans. Ernest Wangermann (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986), p. 341.

<sup>63</sup> Beckett, 'German Letter of 1937', in *Disjecta*, pp. 171-2.

‘direct treatment of the “thing”’, and *The ABC of Reading* (1934), in which he forcefully states that ‘[g]ood writers are those who keep their language efficient’ (Pound 1967, 153).<sup>64</sup> Beckett sees efficiency in managerial terms in his posthumously published play *Eleuthéria* (1995) [1947], having a disgruntled ‘Spectator’ interrupt the action to deride it for being ‘a charivari’ of Taylorist sentimentality (‘*sensiblerie taylorisante*’): a vacuous, technical fetishisation of aesthetic detail, a kind of futurist makeover of the picturesque. During the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, consumerism and production-line technology gave rise to new discourses and practices of efficiency, through which competitors sought to reduce costs at a micro-level in the productive process, for example by closely monitoring employee productivity; Taylorism, Fordism and Stakhanovism are three types of “scientific management”, so-called because it is aimed at improving efficiency by increasing organisation and specialisation in the division of labour from a top-down, rationalistic perspective.<sup>65</sup> Economic rationality is a target in *Murphy*, where Beckett is almost as ferocious as Marx when it comes to the link between managerial exploitation and accumulation, production and reproduction: ‘working for a living’ is nothing more than ‘a procuring and a pimping for the money-bags, one’s lecherous tyrants the money-bags, so they might breed’ (*Mu*, 49). In Marx’s terms, capital grows (or as Beckett puts it, ‘breed[s]’) of its own accord when workers are paid less than the value of their labour, as Marx explains in *Capital* (1867): ‘[a]ccumulation of wealth at one pole is [...] at the same time accumulation of misery, the torment of labour, slavery, ignorance, brutalisation and moral degradation at the opposite pole’.<sup>66</sup> Beckett’s brief but violent critique is even linked to the novel’s economic context, the ‘post-war recovery’, through Murphy’s eviction: there was uninterrupted growth in London throughout the Great Depression, fuelled by low

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<sup>64</sup> Pound, ‘A Retrospect’, in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, pp. 3-15, pp. 4-5. Pound, *The ABC of Reading*, in *Ezra Pound: A Collection of Critical Essays*, p. 32.

<sup>65</sup> Cecilia Tichi, *Shifting Gears: Technology, Literature, Culture in Modernist America* (London: The University of California Press, 1987), pp. 79-80. Beckett, *Eleuthéria* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1995), p. 147.

<sup>66</sup> Marx, *Capital Vol. I*, ed. Ernst Mandel, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 799.

interest rates and a private sector housing boom, which involved widespread ‘slum clearances’ on the grounds, or pretext, of safety (*Mu*, 53). ‘Indeed’, write Nicholas Crafts and Peter Fearon, ‘between 1929 and 1937’ – across the UK as a whole – ‘real GDP increased by 16.4 per cent’, while ‘[t]he Housing Act of 1930 encouraged mass slum clearance and councils set to work to demolish poor quality housing and replace with new build’. In 1933, two years before Beckett began *Murphy*, ‘all authorities were required to concentrate efforts on slum clearance; each had to submit a programme of building and demolition aimed at eliminating slums from their districts’.<sup>67</sup>

Newness, competition, efficiency, managerialism and accumulation: Beckett’s Modernist forebears clashed head-on with economic concepts like these, though in a very different key. For Beckett, Joyce was urged on by the imperatives of ‘knowing more’, incorporating more material, and, implicitly, enrichment: the epistemic and aesthetic counterparts of economic accumulation. As he reported to James Knowlson,

I realised that Joyce had gone as far as one could in the direction of knowing more, [being] in control of one’s material. He was always adding to it [...] I realised that my own way was in impoverishment, in lack of knowledge and taking away, in subtracting rather than in adding.<sup>68</sup>

Franco Moretti points out that Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922) centres on a protagonist whose ‘relentless managerial vocation, his effort to capitalise on every little thing in view of its potential economic usefulness’ makes him a ‘relentless parody of the “spirit of capitalism”’.<sup>69</sup> Beckett goes even further, in a 1956 interview with Israel Shenker, suggesting that Joyce himself was a kind of manager, and an exploitative one at that:

Joyce is a superb manipulator of material – perhaps the greatest. He was making words do the absolute maximum of work. There isn’t a syllable that is superfluous. The kind of work I do is one in which I am not the master of my own material. The

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<sup>67</sup> Nicholas Crafts and Peter Fearon, ‘Lessons from the 1930s Depression’, *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, Vol. 26, Number 3 (2010), p. 296. ‘The History of Council Housing’, *University of the West of England, Bristol*, Web, 18 March 2017.

<sup>68</sup> James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), p. 352.

<sup>69</sup> Franco Moretti, ‘The Long Goodbye: *Ulysses* and the End of Liberal Capitalism’, in *Signs Taken for Wonders: On the Sociology of Literary Forms* (London: Verso, 1983), pp. 182–208, p. 203.

more Joyce knew the more he could. He's tending toward omniscience and omnipotence as an artist. I'm working with impotence, ignorance.<sup>70</sup>

Joyce is 'making the words do the absolute maximum of work', pushing them be as efficient as possible from a top-down, managerial perspective. More specifically, Beckett imagines Joyce's aesthetic 'control' in terms of "scientific management": he is as an 'engineer', an 'innovator' who builds a 'machine' by conjoining conflicting 'elements'.<sup>71</sup> Like Beckett in *Eleuthéria*, Cecilia Tichi understand this new aesthetic paradigm in terms of Taylorism:

Taylorist thought [...] offered writers a new position of authority vis-à-vis themselves and their materials. It redefined the artists' and writers' relation to their work in an age of assembly-line manufacturing from component parts. In the waning of the crafts era, it provided a new self-identification for the artist. One could now be a designer-engineer. For the intellectual centre of Taylorism was not the worker, but the mastermind. It was not the rank and file but the engineer whose formulations would prevail and endure. (Tichi 1987, 77)

For Wyndham Lewis, too, Joyce is 'not so much an inventive intelligence as an executant', concerned with 'ways of doing things, and technical processes, and not things to be done'.<sup>72</sup> Beckett would have rejected Lewis's value judgement, but his terms are practically identical. He is in awe of Joyce on the grounds that Joyce has cornered the market, as it were, in capitalist tropes. Beckett's solution – by 1956 at least – was to reject those tendencies in Joyce that happened to coincide with material economics: efficiency, managerialism and accumulation/exploitation. The thematic preoccupations of *Murphy*, however, suggest that he was having misgivings much earlier.

There are, in fact, signs that Beckett tried to tone down the economic content. The 'mew' of the published text is a 'tenement' in the first notebook; tenement clearances were routine in Depression-era London, as we have seen (Beckett 1935a, 6). After Murphy hears 'Quid pro quo [...] cried as wares', he has an impulse to 'exchange

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<sup>70</sup> Interview with Israel Shenker in the *New York Times*, 5 May 1956, quoted in Federman and Graver, *The Critical Heritage*, p. 148.

<sup>71</sup> Beckett, 'Dante... Bruno. Vico... Joyce', in *Disjecta*, p. 31.

<sup>72</sup> Wyndham Lewis, *Time and Western Man* (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1993), p. 88.

himself', a prolepsis of his fate that links death and economics (*Mu*, 6; Beckett 1935a, 23). In the second notebook, Murphy's indifference to location is regarded '[f]rom the economic point of view', rather than the 'practical point of view' (*Mu*, 46; Beckett 1935b, 127). There are numerous little digs at economic life throughout, with Murphy described ironically as '[q]uite the little business man [sic]' and the narrator noting 'the sense of time as currency which was considered an asset in business' (Beckett 1935b, 136, 127). There are also four hammer and sickle doodles, upside-down or at various strange orientations, next to a note reading 'the hireling fleeth because he is a hireling' (John 10:13; Beckett 1935a, 100; *Mu*, 16). Tellingly, these are overleaf from the passage about the 'metaphysical considerations' that prevent Murphy from working (*Mu*, 16). Perhaps Beckett was semi-consciously drawn to think of the Soviet Union because of its association with organised labour. Whether he imagined the hireling wanting to flee to or from communism is anyone's guess, though the novel's intermittent but vituperative anti-capitalist rhetoric suggests the former.

In *Samuel Beckett: Critical Lives* (2010), Andrew Gibson argues that *Murphy's* 'most crucial form of resistance' resides in the protagonist's 'struggle to overturn the structure of the English morality of work' (Gibson 2010, 70-1). 'Contradictorily', he continues, while English employers 'often thought Irish employees [were] unusually hardworking', there was also a 'stereotype' of the Irish 'as slovenly and indolent' (Gibson 2010, 71). Crucially, 'Beckett and Murphy do not seek to challenge this stereotype. They rather seek to overturn the system of value that subtends [...] it' (Gibson 2010, 71). While Gibson is historically correct to align this stereotype with 'the triumphant mercantilism of the old colonial power and the economic logic of Irish migration', the rest of this chapter will explore in more detail what *Murphy* has to say about the 'system of value' that subtends them (Gibson 2010, 71). It is not just 'the English morality of work' and its historical causes that the novel is attempting to 'overturn'. It is working on behalf of a 'system of value' that prioritises newness, using up products and people alike as if their worth vanished at the instant of exchange.



Jennifer M. Jeffers has argued that '[t]he themes of work and emasculation' are 'intertwined' in *Murphy*.<sup>73</sup> The link is attributed in part to Beckett's admiration for his father's proud, pragmatic masculinity, epitomised by a 'Victorian Protestant work ethic that focused principally on homosocial work, sport, and leisure relationships' (Jeffers 2009, 15). Beckett identified with his father, and identified his father with work. There are abundant textual reasons, Jeffers argues, to believe that Bill Beckett's sudden death in June 1933 may have been experienced as a loss of vicarious masculinity for Beckett, at a time when he was already anxious about his role in the world, defined in terms of the "masculine" sphere of employment. What's more, Beckett had already demonstrated an ugly tendency towards, high-brow, backslapping misogyny in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, suggesting that his problems with masculinity predated his father's death. Belacqua, a clear stand-in for Beckett himself, doubts that 'you can love a woman *and* use her a private convenience', and the novel casts a woman in each role.<sup>74</sup> Of the Alba, whom Belacqua adores, the narrator puritanically says '[h]e has not lain with her. Nor she with him. None of that kind of thing here, if you don't mind' (*Dr*, 101). The Smeraldina-Rima bursting Weib, ripe' (*Dr*, 15). As Paul Stewart points out, Belacqua's two 'capital divas' represent a Cartesian-Kantian bifurcation of mind and body, noumenon and phenomenon, with the former valorised and the latter traduced (*Dr*, 49).<sup>75</sup>

Idealising women as chaste and inviolable, or repudiating them as an all-too-available repository for abject male desire, is also familiar from psychoanalysis. In the ornately titled 'On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love' (1912), Freud attributes the pervasiveness of 'psychical impotence' among men seeking psychoanalytic treatment to this failure to integrate love and desire.<sup>76</sup> If Beckett was

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<sup>73</sup> Jennifer M. Jeffers, *Beckett's Masculinity* (New York: Palgrave, 2009), p. 50.

<sup>74</sup> Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, ed. Eoin O'Brien and Edith Fournier (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1990), p. 101. My italics.

<sup>75</sup> Paul Stewart, *Sex and Aesthetics* (New York: Palgrave, 2011), pp. 34-5.

<sup>76</sup> Freud, 'On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love', in James Strachey (ed. And trans.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*,

already inclined to idealise and denigrate women, it is likely that his father's death exacerbated that underlying neuroses about impotence and 'emasculatation', as Jeffers puts it. With the themes of work, masculinity and sexuality all intertwined in *Murphy*, it makes sense that the novel has a psychosexual dimension. It would also make sense for Beckett's anxieties about work to develop a psychoanalytic undercurrent, since his bereavement is what drove him to seek out treatment in the first place.

Beset by a formidable array of psychogenic symptoms, Beckett moved to London at the beginning of 1934 to receive a form of psychoanalytic psychotherapy with Wilfred Bion, then a trainee under J. A. Hadfield. As Steven Connor notes, J. A. Hadfield was one of the leading lights of the Tavistock Clinic at the time, though his theory differed from Freud in the conviction that there is no such thing as transference.<sup>77</sup> It is hard to imagine any kind of responsibly practiced depth psychology that does not take account of this phenomenon, so arguably this means that Beckett did not receive psychoanalysis in the sense the term usually carries. This may help to explain the loose, haphazard way that psychoanalysis is used in the novel, as we will see in a moment.

Beckett's analysis went on for nearly two years, narrowly overlapping with the composition of *Murphy*, before Beckett brought it to a premature end. During this period Beckett read Ernest Jones, Alfred Adler, Otto Rank, but only a little commentary on Freud himself (Knowlson 1996, 178). Temperamentally suspicious of both philosophical systems and state-of-the-art panaceas, Beckett's experience of psychoanalytic psychotherapy apparently confirmed his theoretical misgivings. Still, he was able to find an aesthetic use for psychoanalysis in his novel; and it is one that, ironically, performs something like the therapeutic function that therapy itself had not.

In his review of *Murphy* in the March 1938 edition of *New English Weekly*, Dylan Thomas concludes that Beckett's first published novel is ultimately 'wrong' because it

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Vol. 11: *Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis, Leonardo da Vinci and Other Works* (London: Vintage, 2001), p. 170.

<sup>77</sup> Steven Connor, 'Beckett and Bion', *Journal of Beckett Studies*, 17.1-2, p. 10.

relies too much on 'Freudian Blarney'.<sup>78</sup> At our historical distance, this seems like a strange emphasis to find or even to confer on the text. It is, if anything, strikingly unFreudian in its presentation of mental illness, which only appears in untreatable forms; and its sexual wordplay is nothing, as Thomas's contradictorily implies, that Joyce couldn't manage without the benefit of much Freud (Thomas 1938, 48). There is some material in the text that is specific to Freudian psychology: for example, Murphy is eventually employed at an asylum with a wing for 'neurotics' and a wing for 'psychotics' (*Mu*, 110), the former being described as a 'sublimatoria' (*Mu*, 105). Less explicitly, Wylie's pessimistic-mechanical conception of desire bears some resemblance to Freud's conception of intrapsychic 'economics', with libido only ever displaced from one object to the next in a 'closed system' (*Mu*, 38). But Thomas's judgement seems, on the whole, to be tendentiously wide of the mark.

However, if we take 'Freudian' to mean the spectrum of psychological theories and clinical practices based on a normative conception of health and development, stressing the importance of sexuality, and modelled on something like Wylie's closed system, then the novel does indeed appear to be oppressively psychoanalytic. Thomas thinks that *Murphy's* use of psychoanalysis is a failing because it is too formulaic, but I would argue that this is precisely the point. Clinical psychology is on the side of 'the big world' of social and economic norms (*Mu*, 6). Murphy starts out looking for a living, and ends up dying in an asylum. It would not be too much to say that the text is polemically opposed to any form of 'therapeutic voodoo', exemplified above all by the corrupt and officious Magdalen Mental Mercyseat, where the novel and its protagonist meet their ends (*Mu*, 148). Institutional psychology is shown to be committed to the pathologisation of individual oddities defined against the Procrustean norms of the day.

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<sup>78</sup> In this xenophobic context, I take 'Blarney' to mean 'nonsense' rather than 'smoothly flattering or cajoling' (OED Online 2016). It is worth noting that the *New English Weekly* supported the Social Credit Party, which advocated the implementation of C.H. Douglas's ideas in *Economic Democracy* (1920). Dylan Thomas, Review of *Murphy* in 'New English Weekly', 17 March 1938, pp. 454-455, quoted in Federman and Graver, *The Critical Heritage*, p. 48.

For the Beckett of *Murphy*, these are doubly inseparable from the economic imperative to work.

Following Knowlson, Jeffers suggests that the psychoanalytic dimension of Beckett's anxiety about work was intensified by his financial dependence on his mother, May, who was also pressing him to find a respectable profession (Jeffers 2009, 50). Beckett's aesthetic solution to these stressors is psychoanalytically brazen. He swaps the external source of pressure to find work, his Mother, for a sex-worker named Celia, who mimics Murphy's 'life strike' with her own embargo on sex (*Mu*, 115). Beckett even puts his mother's words – work will 'make a man of him' (Knowlson 1996, 215) – directly into the mouth of Celia (*Mu*, 43). There is no way that Beckett was not aware that this is an outrageously Oedipal substitution. It is as if he were anticipating and neutralising the violently triumphant "gotcha" moment of interpretation, central to both Freudian, and, at the time, Bionian psychoanalysis. Sex is forbidden because Murphy has not yet qualified for masculinity by demonstrating it in the masculine sphere of employment. The story betrays a hope that the incest taboo will be lifted by inheriting or supplanting the masculinity of the father. So what? The valorisation of work, and the masculinity at stake in it, is crudely and knowingly reduced to psychosexual categories that lose their therapeutic and perhaps even epistemic value by being incorporated too easily into conscious awareness. The rhetoric of honest toil is recast in the tawdry light of a psychodrama of distasteful but ultimately indifferent revelations. The obligation to find a job is relieved of legitimacy on two fronts: the capitalist ethic of the dignity of work is undermined by psychoanalysis, and psychoanalysis is undermined by being presented as an instrument of social control. The novel ironically performs a therapeutic function that both its protagonist and its author were in need of, attacking the social obligation to find employment by implicating it in the very 'Freudian Blarney' the novel then goes on to attack as a regulatory function of economic society.

Adam Phillips has described how, in psychoanalytic terms, the imperative to “make it new” becomes a super-ego demand, at once a necessity for psychic survival and defeat’.<sup>79</sup> This is because, according to Freud, desire was originally incestuous, so desire must be always the desire for ‘a forbidden object’ (Phillips 2005, 203). The more the past is disavowed, the greater its unconscious grip on us. The desire for newness – or rather a certain resistance to old or existing objects – must be inflected by the anxiety of staying in one place, by the feeling that one must always go on. It is the never-ending flight from an Oedipal present, from the same, which is what is familiar.

This logic of value is contradictory, as capitalism can show us. The never-ending production of new commodities presupposes a consumer whose aim it is to maintain their satisfaction or “utility” at a consistent level, so that, in the words of one recent textbook, ‘[a]s the consumer loses some of one commodity, he/she must receive more of another if satisfaction is to be maintained’.<sup>80</sup> This nominal consumer, making decisions which presuppose a finite sum of any given resource, including love and the human lifespan, hopes that by going endlessly in search of novelty, they will be able stay the same. The ‘closed system’ of subjective desire (*Mu*, 38, 65, 70, 74, 114, 124), the necessity of finding new objects and activities to counteract diminishing returns of satisfaction on the relation of newness, is what ensures, both subjectively and objectively, that there is ‘no alternative’ to ‘the nothing new’ (*Mu*, 3). Desire is an impersonal, alien force in *Murphy*, rendering all objects tragically and farcically exhaustible by a kind of ontological legerdemain that takes the relation of newness for the object itself. This is the essence of the capital relation, which can only value what is or might be changing hands. As Marx writes in *Capital*:

[a]ll commodities are non-use-values for their owners, and use-values for their non-owners. Consequently, they must all change hands. But this change of hands is what

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<sup>79</sup> Adam Phillips, *Side Effects* (London: Penguin, 2005), p. 177.

<sup>80</sup> Graham Bannock and R. E. Baxter, *The Penguin Dictionary of Economics* (London: Penguin, 2011), p. 72.

constitutes their exchange, and the latter puts them in relation with each other as values, and realises them as values. (Marx 1990, 179)

In Marx's terms, the commodity has no use-value for its owner, because a commodity is something whose value is only realised in exchange. Meanwhile, the commodity can only have use-value for its non-owner, because it cannot appear to them in the light of exchange, i.e. as value in relation to other values, if it is not theirs to exchange. In *Murphy's* terms, this means that the individual can have no desiring relationship to something they already possess, besides the desire to exchange it for something new. Since the relation of newness is, by definition, rapidly self-undoing, desire can only negate the value of objects or choose to remain aloof from them in a state of permanent frustration, which in practice becomes the 'same thing' – and not only the same thing subjectively, but the reason '[things] will always be as they always were', in a flux of equivalence. This 'logic of substitution', a recurring theme and structure in Beckett's writing, effaces the particularity of things under its perennially hungry stare.<sup>81</sup> It is certainly borne out by the supporting cast of the novel: Wylie and Miss Counihan cynically use one another as disposable stop-gaps (e.g. *Mu*, 123), while Neary 'scratches himself out of one itch and into another' (*Mu*, 125-6). Every bucket going down to be filled is the same bucket; the content is indifferent; circulation, the transfer of quantity, is the only thing that matters. That is how it is in 'the big world where *Quid pro quo* [is] cried' (*Mu*, 3).

Being able to tolerate this eternal flight from an Oedipal present, a flight which only serves to reproduce the conditions of its necessity, is what constitutes, if not exactly psychic good health in the world of Beckett's novel, then at least the least worst position. But Murphy is not permitted to stay unemployed in the tenement in West Brompton, from which he is uterinically evicted on the opening page, setting the narrative in motion, bringing the novel reluctantly to life. Since he is not allowed to

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<sup>81</sup> David Lloyd, *Irish Culture and Colonial Modernity 1800-2000: The Transformation of Oral Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 212.

remain at the narratively non-existent centre of his 'little world', it makes sense for him to plot a course to the nearest exit, to the circumference, where both protagonist and text may be relieved of their existences. It is important that it is institutional psychotherapy that Murphy finds on the periphery of the 'big world', forcing him to work, to a health which is defined in terms of its economic functionality. This is why employment and psychological treatment are elided. The latter will remain in the service of the former, the text seems to say, for as long as sanity is the sanity of an Oedipal insatiability for the new, the sanity of the 'the Market, where the frenzied justification of life as an end to means' destroys 'all [...] of life's goods' (*Mu*, 44). The alternative is to 'consummate [one's] life's strike with a slap-up psychosis' (*Mu*, 116); a fate forbidden for Murphy, but a line which compresses the main themes of the novel with an ironically Modernist efficiency: desire, unemployment and what is most extemporarily out of touch with the requirements of the market.

Recent critical work has done much to complicate the received wisdom about Modernism's relationship to the economic imperative to 'make it new'. Michael North, for example, has observed Pound's celebrated rallying cry is a 'fairly wilful' mistranslation of a Confucian proverb from the 12th century, which could not be much more remote from contemporary capitalism.<sup>82</sup> The preponderance of economic concepts in Pound's critical writing make it difficult, however, to detach the aesthetic imperative from its economic counterpart. Raymond Williams claims that 'Modernism's forms lent themselves to cultural competition and the commercial interplay of obsolescence, with its shifts of schools, styles and fashions so essential to the market', as if economic tropes and realities were always necessarily identical.<sup>83</sup> It is not essential for my argument to concur uncritically with this view, since it has primarily concerned a logic of value that subtends the desire for newness in all its

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<sup>82</sup> Michael North, "The Making of "Make It New", *Guernica: A Magazine of Art and Politics*, Web, 13 July 2016.

<sup>83</sup> Raymond Williams, 'When Was Modernism?', *New Left Review*, no. 175, May/June 1989, pp. 48-52, p. 51.

forms. But it is hard to see what else Beckett could be suggesting to George Duthuit, when he exasperatedly declares ‘once and for all’ that ‘we are still in a world of competition, of winning and losing’ (*LSB* 2, 166). Aesthetic and economic ‘winning’ must have seemed related, if not identical, to Beckett in 1949, twenty years into a writing career without much of either, as far as he was concerned. It is no wonder that losing and loss become central to his writing at this period of time, as I discuss in the chapter 3.

Of all the criticism that considers the relationship between aesthetics and economics in the Modernist period, John Xiros Cooper’s *Modernism and the Culture of Market Society* (2004) represents the most uncompromising position. For Cooper, Modernism did not resist market society by mimicking it in an autonomous aesthetic realm, as Adorno suggested; nor did it provide Jameson’s ‘virtual solutions’ for economic problems. Cooper would not disagree with Rosenquist that the likes of Pound and Joyce were all too happy to make full use of market society to promote their work and ensure their legacies; but he goes a huge step further than that. Cooper argues that Modernism was, quite straightforwardly, the aesthetic expression of ‘fully developed market society’.<sup>84</sup> It started, he claims, in the ‘Modernist bohémias’ where ‘gender and sexual emancipation’ began to flourish; and as these values spread out from their elitist enclaves they fostered a new and ‘distinctive culture’ based around ‘activities of economic exchange’ (Cooper 2004, 4-5). According to Cooper, we are still living out the ‘paradigms’ and forms of value produced by the Modernists in their attempt to ‘smash through the patina of propriety’ in nineteenth-century culture (Cooper 2004, 5, 3). It is partly because those values were recuperated by sixties counterculture and other movements, Cooper suggests, but that is not the main point. The main point is that ‘the fixed values of the past have been devalued or degraded’ by ‘the practical effects of the market’ (i.e. ‘the slow degradation of use into exchange [value]’); and that Modernism

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<sup>84</sup> John Xiros Cooper, *Modernism and the Culture of Market Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 4.



filled the void with the opportunities it provided for ‘unlimited change and self-development’, i.e. making it new (Cooper 2004, 7). This is now mostly expressed in ‘the variables that provide the capitalist market with its uniquely mobile ways of ascertaining the price of commodities’: the ways that commodities and people are obliged to renew themselves to maintain or enhance their value (Cooper 2004, 7). ‘Whether we like it or not’, Cooper says, this is one of the main ‘material conditions of freedom as we know it in modern times’ (Cooper 2004, 7). And that freedom consists in ‘the creative destruction of the vestiges of the past that limited the possibilities and potential for unlimited change and self-development’, i.e. in the value of the new (Cooper 2004, 7). Modernism’s demand for incessant newness, then, was not the result of capitalism’s relentless production of new commodities. Modernism created the desire for newness that the relentless production of commodities went on to fulfil.

Where does Beckett stand in all this? Beckett’s work, with its emphasis on scarcity rather than plenitude, seems to contradict Adorno’s saving idea about resistant mimicry. If, as Adorno writes, Modernism’s demand for newness reveals what capitalism hides, ‘preserving the image of an end smothered completely by rationality’, then Beckett’s resistance to newness and plenitude would seem to revert to the original mystification (Adorno 2013, 79). In terms of Crary’s position, it is clear that *Murphy* is inseparable from scientific and economic rationalisation: the novel is inundated in recondite scientific jokes, and the plot is uncritically kicked into action by economic need; Murphy does not see his eviction as anything less than a metaphysical inconvenience. On the other hand, *Murphy* clearly *is* a reaction of some kind to economic rationality, because the protagonist palpably despises economic need and the text as a whole interrogates the conditions of value that demand newness in desire and writing (‘The sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new...’). But it is not clear that *Murphy* is attempting to ‘transcend’ economics in the sense Crary means, partly because it is Beckett’s least autonomous work, being worlded from the first page by ‘*Quid pro quo*’ and careful calculations of biscuit-based utility. Jameson’s argument

could apply, if we accept a reading of Beckett's attack on 'rationalisation and reification' that is mimetic in Adorno's sense, with Murphy (e.g.) succumbing to a much more extreme form of bourgeois individualism than anything in Conrad. But that, I would suggest, is the point. *Murphy* might attempt to retreat into his 'little world', but it is explicitly connected to his desire not to work. There is neither Adorno's assertion of autonomy nor Jameson's economically inflected failure to achieve it. Murphy knows his bid for freedom is economically prompted, so there is nothing to reinscribe; it is inscribed from the start. To repeat an earlier argument, it is only by taking Beckett's thematisation of economics 'at its word' – by interpreting its economic content representationally, at least in part – that it escapes the problems posed by first-generation Modernists (Adorno 2010, 173). Beckett makes newness the subject of his novel, as the first line suggests; and frames it with a plot about work and a theory about novelty and desire. That was his first go at a way round the economic problem of Modernism, and it leads to the problem of choice and equivalence (equilibrium), as the biscuit set-piece shows. These are two of the major themes of *Watt*, not coincidentally, as Beckett struggles to work out a model of value that can find or maintain access to Modernism's vital spontaneity without its competitive drive for newness. As for Cooper, it is hard to imagine any 'paradigm' for social existence coming out of Beckett; and I think that this is probably Beckett's best chance for a political reading along the lines of Modernism and economics. Beckett's rejection of newness is a rejection of an aesthetic imperative before it is a rejection of an economic one; but *Murphy* makes the connection better and earlier than many other writers. Capitalism's rationality, its craving for newness and its fantasy of plenitude, is based on a logic of scarcity that Beckett's work does reveal, both structurally and in content. In content, scarcity is visible enough: there is hardly anything of anything, and whatever is left is running out. Structurally, scarcity is manifest in chiasmic self-cancelling patterns, like Wylie asserting that '[h]umanity is a well with two buckets, [...] one going down to be filled, the other coming up to be emptied', or Murphy being a story about someone needing a

job and Beckett's job being the composition of *Murphy*, or psychoanalysis being used to criticise capitalism and capitalism being used to criticise psychoanalysis. In each case one value wipes out another (near enough); but that is not about scarcity directly. The chiasmus is the grammatical form of Marginalism, the theory that value only ever pivots between two options: the utility of your current allocation of resources, and the utility of a different one. This is about scarcity because it presupposes a finite quantity of utility that 'must be maintained', to invoke my epigraph (one bucket down, the other bucket up); and it is about scarcity because it is modelled on a zero-sum game that presupposes scarce resources of time, money, cathexes etc. The decision would not take this form unless if we did not have to distribute our one life over a series of either-or choices: the decision to keep our allocation of resources as it is, or the decision to change it. The irony of Marginalism is that it depends on a universal equivalent (utility, money) but it can only compare two things at a time, like the commodity stuck at the relevant/equivalent form of value.

In *Flaubert, Joyce and Beckett: The Stoic Comedians* (1964), Hugh Kenner describes his subjects 'each scorching the earth in turn where his successor would sow his crop'.<sup>85</sup> One of the points of this chapter has been that Beckett's work, with its later emphasis on 'impotence', 'ignorance', exhaustion and other forms of sterility, realises there is 'nothing to be done' with the 'losing game' of a tradition which values novelty, efficiency, managerialism and accumulation, with authors behaving like capitalists in seeking to outdo their competitors.<sup>86</sup> It charges onto ever more marginal lands, cultivating that exponentially meagre product and, as Harold Pinter put it so delicately, 'grinding it in our noses'.<sup>87</sup> On this reading, Clov's insistence in *Endgame* (1957) that '[t]here's no more nature' would be more than a prescient gag on the metaphysics of the

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<sup>85</sup> Hugh Kenner, *Flaubert, Joyce and Beckett: The Stoic Comedians* (London: W. H. Allen, 1964), p. vxiii.

<sup>86</sup> Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, in *The Complete Dramatic Works*, e.g. p. 11. Beckett, *Malone Dies*, p. 227.

<sup>87</sup> Harold Pinter, "Samuel Beckett", in *Various Voices: Prose, Poetry, Politics* (New York: Grove Press, 1998), p. 55.

Anthropocene.<sup>88</sup> *Endgame*'s barrenness specifically figures the exhaustion of resources and the slowing to halt of "technological" advances in the field of literary aesthetics, a Ricardian 'stationary state' in the history of culture. In this sense, the path of Modernist innovation that Beckett was unable or unwilling to tread in the literary marketplace in *Murphy* is, in economic terms, the cause of the environmental catastrophe that he would later use to imagine his counter-project of productive sterility.

*Murphy* is an anti-*Künstlerroman* because the protagonist, who is forced onto the 'jobpath' by external, or externalised, pressures, is an allegorical portrait of the failure to become a particular kind of artist (*Mu*, 46). We know from Beckett's correspondence that he thought of the novel he was writing as 'poor stuff' that he had 'no interest in' (*LSB 1*, 277); 'a most unsavoury and dishonest work' (*LSB 1*, 337) he had to 'forc[e] [himself] to keep' writing (*LSB 1*, 277). Raymond Federman, Frederick N. Smith and Gary Adelman are among the critics to observe how Beckett's later prose works, such as *How It Is*, fictionalise the process of composition (and 'decomposition'); I am suggesting that this autotelic approach is already in evidence in *Murphy*, albeit with an inverted conclusion.<sup>89</sup> Where in the final swerve of *How It Is* the protagonist negates the existence of other beings, in *Murphy* the protagonist is himself negated, allegorising the dead-end of Poundian, Joycean Modernism that Beckett felt he was up against. Psychosis and death are the only ways out for Murphy. Being incapable of any meaningful form of madness, the novel performatively euthanises its own authorial stand-in, just as 'Hugh Selwyn Mauberley' destroyed Pound's own earlier aestheticist persona. *Murphy*, the novel, puts the author of a novel like *Murphy* out of his misery.

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<sup>88</sup> Beckett, *Endgame*, in *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 97.

<sup>89</sup> Raymond Federman, "'How It Is': with Beckett's Fiction" [sic], *The French Review*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (1965), pp. 459-468, p. 459. Frederick N. Smith, 'Fiction as Composing Process: *How It Is*', in Morris Beja, S. E. Gontarski and Pierre A. G. Astier (ed.), *Samuel Beckett: Humanistic Perspectives* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Ohio State University Press, 1983), pp. 107-121. Gary Adelman, 'Torturer and Servant: Samuel Beckett's *How It Is*', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 25.1 (2001), pp. 81-90.

This conclusion is augured, in fact, by Murphy's frolics with the immortal biscuits (*Mu*, 64). He had imagined, hubristically, that his lunch was a knowable finite budget constraint, unlike life, and he was content to play around with his preferences in a safely virtual environment. But his little model of life's market did not allow for a sausage dog called Nelly:

Murphy had been too absorbed in this touching little argonautic, and above all in the ecstatic demeanour of the sheep, to pay any attention to Nelly. He now discovered that she had eaten all the biscuits with the exception of the Ginger... (*Mu*, 64)

Nelly eats nearly all of Murphy's death-defying lunch, sparing only the ginger biscuit. This would be a moment of deliriously inane preterition, a backwards god leaving Murphy and his 'life' intact, 'his preference for the ginger biscuit'. But Murphy does not prefer it anymore. The reason given for this is precise: Nelly's 'appetite' did not 'extend' to it, and Murphy does not want to eat 'a rutting cur's rejectamenta' (*Mu*, 65). Nelly has eaten the biscuits in the order that she prefers them, ranking her preferences in accordance with the principle of marginal utility, until she reaches the point of satiety, or "bliss point" (in neoclassical parlance), where continuing to eat would make her less satisfied. Her desire to eat the least desired biscuit has reached equilibrium with her desire to not eat the least desired biscuit. This might well put Murphy off his lunch. Nelly is death in this scenario, in that she represents the unknowable finite quantity of time that means Murphy has to choose between things, or to playfully invert the order of his choices to cope with the anxiety of preference under normal conditions. She has broken the spell of the game where he gets to decide not to die, or to die right on time, by making his resources predictably scarce. But she is also phantasmatically Murphy himself, since the order in which she ranks her preferences is the one that Murphy would have chosen if he wasn't playing at being immortal. Is there a vanishingly subtle joke, here, about biscuits, *bis-cuits*, "twice cooked", and Murphy's demise? Like his biscuits, Murphy is himself "cooked" twice at the end of his book, being incinerated in a gas explosion and subsequently cremated (*Mu*, 158). Nelly, "knell-y", is in this silly

respect Murphy's deathly doppelganger, a spooky prolepsis at the level of narrative structure, the return of the repressed in his lunchtime frolics with immortality. Taking the biscuit, she is also the author's surrogate, a terrible pun on the structural role she plays in the novel. The harbinger of two ends, of Murphy and of *Murphy*, it is fitting that Nelly should be a sausage dog, and a presciently 'hot' one at that (*Mu*, 65).

## 2: Black Markets / A Dialectic of Equilibrium in *Watt* and *Molloy*.

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*So absolutely disinterested, like a poem, or useful in the depths where demand and supply coincide, and the prayer is god.*

- Samuel Beckett, letter to Thomas MacGreevy, 8/9/35.<sup>1</sup>

*The search for equilibrium is bad because it is imaginary.*

- Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*.<sup>2</sup>

The most wastefully written vignette in *Watt* (1953) [1945] is about making sure there is no waste from Mr Knott's dinner. This is a chore, we are ominously reassured, that 'gave very little trouble'.<sup>3</sup> In the published text, Knott's untroublesome problem goes on for 30 or so pages, as Watt attempts to rig up a kind of economy to offset the unpredictability of his employer's appetite, the vagaries of the human and canine lifespans in conditions of extreme precarity, and so on. Underlying Knott's monomaniacal insistence on the elimination of waste is the principle of equilibrium. This is made more exhaustively clear in the 1945 typescript, where Watt pursues the errant leftovers for another 8,300 words, through a series of iterations of the problem of equilibrium to their almost intractable endpoint: a notorious 'spectacle' of canine love, put on by the Lynch family for the amelioration of the local population, in which one dog is left out of the fun.<sup>4</sup> Equilibrium was Beckett's model for aesthetic 'spontane[ity]' in the 1930s, but *Watt's* obscene meditation on the imperative to eliminate waste shows him having misgivings about it (*LSB 1*, 134). Using another variant passage from the third *Molloy* notebook (1947), this chapter will argue that

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Beckett, *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Vol 1, 1929-1940*, eds. George Craig, Martha Dow Fehsenfeld, Dan Gunn and Lois More Overbeck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 274.

<sup>2</sup> Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, ed. and trans. Gustave Thibon (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Beckett, *Watt*, ed. C. J. Ackersley (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 2009), p. 72.

<sup>4</sup> Beckett, *Watt* typescript, Series I, Box 7, Folder 7, Samuel Beckett Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, p. 297.

Beckett is drawn to economics as a way of working through the historically troubling implications of an aesthetic philosophy he had already found wanting. It will suggest that the Ballyba passage, which describes a command economy in which human beings are principally regarded as shit, was omitted from the published text of *Molloy* (1951) because its many inadvertent parallels with totalitarian bureaucracies throw out a delicate comic economy of representation. It will point to one neglected example of the novel's scant, desultory deictic markers to show how that economy works. It will conclude that, although there is no intrinsic link between the kind of economics Beckett uses in his comedy and his use of economics as a way of working through aesthetic problems, his jettisoned black markets are a painstaking indictment of the economic model, based on equilibrium, that subtends them both.

In the third *Molloy* notebook there is a 2,400-word long set-piece about the economy of Ballyba. This economy has been described by Adam Winstanley as 'coprophagic', which literally means "to eat shit", because the citizens of Ballyba are obliged by law to recycle their exceptionally fertile excrement.<sup>5</sup> Moran, an 'agent' on the tail of Molloy, compiles a report on his subject's homeland, detailing the municipal arrangements that allow the authorities to collect Ballyba's aggregate waste, and the incentive structures that ensure, by and large, that its citizens cooperate.<sup>6</sup> The inputs and outputs of the faecal economy are strictly monitored by 'l'O.M. (Organisation Maraîchère)', whose function it is to ensure all waste is properly repurposed, being used in agriculture to feed the population, with the surplus sold on to neighbouring territories.<sup>7</sup> The 'O'.M. devolves responsibility for setting targets for the production of shit to local committees. If an individual does not meet their 'obligation', they are

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<sup>5</sup> Adam Winstanley, "'Grâce aux Excréments des Citoyens': Beckett, Swift and the Coprophagic Economy of Ballyba", in Dirk Van Hulle, Mark Nixon and David Tucker (eds.), *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui: Revisiting Molloy, Malone Meurt/Malone Dies and L'Innomable/The Unnamable* (New York: Editions Rodopi B. V., 2014), p. 91.

<sup>6</sup> Beckett, *Molloy*, in *Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies and The Unnamable* (New York: Grove Press, 2009), p. 89.

<sup>7</sup> Beckett, 'Molloy notebook 3' [1947], Series I, Box 4, Folder 7, Samuel Beckett Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, p. 136.



required to make up for the deficit monetarily, as Laura Salisbury notes.<sup>8</sup> Government officials are exempt from this rule, as Edouard Magessa O'Reilly observes, suggesting the kind of corruption that is often said to characterise regimes in which power has been concentrated in the hands of a bureaucratic class.<sup>9</sup> Awards are given to the most productive members of society, perhaps a nod to the Soviet practice of Stakhanovism and the cult of the “heroic worker”. Though exchange appears to be forbidden, there are rumours of covert profiteers, including one gentleman named Colbert. Not content with receiving official recognition for his personal overproduction, Colbert was so full of shit he grew wealthy selling on his surplus to those unable to meet their targets. A potential source here might be Louis XIV’s finance minister, John-Baptiste Colbert, who is remembered for introducing protectionist market reforms that anticipate the *dirigiste* system in 20<sup>th</sup> century France, but also for establishing one of the first ‘secret state intelligence systems’.<sup>10</sup>

O'Reilly concludes that ‘Ballyba's economy metonymically reduces [the] material and social world (bureaucracy, technology, social status, etc.) [...] to shit’, because Beckett’s ‘Schopenhauerian’ or perhaps ‘Buddhist’ instincts oblige him to renounce such worldly concerns in preference of ‘the inward search for the source of voice and self’ (O'Reilly 2006, Web). While Beckett is certainly having some fun mocking the relatively widespread historical existence of officious bureaucrats and arbitrary economic imperatives, this brief account of some of the passage’s deictic markers suggests that it is not an apolitical, generalised repudiation of what Schopenhauer

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<sup>8</sup> Laura Salisbury, *Samuel Beckett: Laughing Matters, Comic Timing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p. 99.

<sup>9</sup> Edouard Magessa O'Reilly, ‘Molloy, Part II, Where the Shit Hits the Fan: Ballyba’s Economy and the Worth of the World’, *Genetic Joyce Studies*, Issue 6, 2006, Web, 18 November 2016.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Colbert’ thus tallies with Moran’s role as ‘agent’ and, as we will see, Adam Winstanley’s argument about protectionism. It also suggests the black markets that tend to spring up in totalitarian regimes, wartime economies and concentration camps. Incidentally, James Knowlson notes that Beckett and MacGreevy’s nickname for the janitor at the Ecole Normale was ‘Louvois’, the name of Colbert’s successor. Jacob Soll, *The Information Master: Jean-Baptiste Colbert’s Secret State Intelligence System* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, p. 2011), p. 3. James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), p. 93.

would call the ‘will’s phenomena’.<sup>11</sup> Emilie Morin proposes that ‘Irish political conservatism’ might be a more specific historical context for the economy of Ballyba, arguing that the reason Mania Perón discouraged Beckett from including the passage was that she ‘disapproved’ of his recondite quarrels with Ireland.<sup>12</sup> Winstanley develops this argument, pointing to Irish economic protectionism of the 1930s, juxtaposed with the bleak economic conditions in post-war France, as the historical sources for the omitted section. Drawing on Salisbury’s claim that Ballyba is ‘a parody of a perfectly ordered petit-bourgeois world and a smoothly functioning capitalist economy based on the uninterrupted passage of consumption and excrement’ (Salisbury 2012, 99), Winstanley suggests that it is not ‘an unrestricted system of free trade’ Beckett is parodying, but ‘the parsimonious tendencies’ of ‘overly retentive’ forms of ‘political economy’ (Winstanley 2014, 99). Combining the two arguments, Winstanley concludes that it is both a satire on the ‘prosperity’ that comes of systemic hoarding per se, and a historically specific ‘indictment of Ireland’s retentive economy policy’ in the post-war period, which sought to ‘accumulate material resources whilst its European neighbours struggle[d] to find clean sources of drinking water’ (Winstanley, 2014, 95).

This points us, via a short philological detour, in the direction of a related historical context for Ballyba’s economy. Dirk Van Hulle translates the phrase ‘Organisation Maraîchère’ as ‘Market Garden Organisation’.<sup>13</sup> A “market garden” is a ‘low-tech, human-scale, biointensive’ form of gardening that industrial farming techniques and state subsidies had, by the middle of the century, rendered largely uncompetitive in developed nations.<sup>14</sup> Dickens heralded its demise as early as *Our Mutual Friend* (1865),

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<sup>11</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Presentation*, Vol 1, trans. Richard E. Aquila (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 329.

<sup>12</sup> Emilie Morin, *Samuel Beckett and the Problem of Irishness* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 88-9.

<sup>13</sup> Dirk Van Hulle, ‘The Obidil and the Man of Glass: Denarration, Genesis and Cognition in Beckett’s *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*’, in Dirk Van Hulle, Mark Nixon and David Tucker (eds.), *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd’hui: Revisiting Molloy, Malone Meurt/Malone Dies and L’Innomable/The Unnamable* (New York: Editions Rodopi B. V., 2014), p. 27.

<sup>14</sup> Jean-Martin Fortier, *The Market Gardener: A Successful Grower’s Handbook for Small-Scale Organic Farming*, trans. Scott Irving (Gabriola Island: New Society Publishers, 2014), p. i.

writing that ‘the market-gardens will soon die under’ the ‘railways’ that now ‘bestride’ them.<sup>15</sup> It is therefore probable that Beckett had another source in mind for his bureaucratic regime. Operation Market Garden was a ‘calamitous’ and ‘humiliating’ Allied defeat in Arnhem on 17 September 1944. Then the single biggest airborne operation in history, Field Marshall Montgomery believed that it had a 90% chance to end the war by Christmas.<sup>16</sup> Instead, Arnhem was looted by the Nazis, who starved the civilian population and turned it into a garrison town; crucial resources were diverted from other battles, leading to defeats in Walcheren and Beveland and causing ‘immense logistical headaches’ for the Allies throughout Europe; and 10,930 Allied troops died (Buckley et. al 2016, 183). A film, *Theirs is the Glory* (1946), was released on the second anniversary of the mission, becoming ‘the biggest-grossing war film’ ever, and retaining that distinction for a decade; a dubbed version of the film, *La Gloire est à eux*, was released in France the following year.<sup>17</sup> If Beckett did not already know of the mission, the popularity of these films is likely to have brought it to his attention.

The codename ‘Market Garden’ suggests a macabre reading of the Ballyba passage. Though picked from 10 randomly generated words, World War 2 codenames were sometimes chosen with knowing or comic intent. For example, Operation ‘Orange Blossom’ was named after a cocktail and not, as might be expected, after the flower.<sup>18</sup> This is faintly comic because military bloodbaths and strong alcohol are drastically unlike delicate flora. ‘Market Garden’ is funny in a similar way. It calls to mind an

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<sup>15</sup> Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend* (London: Penguin Classics, 1995), p. 219.

<sup>16</sup> John Buckley and Peter Preston-Hough, *Operation Market Garden: The Campaign for the Low Countries, Autumn 1944: Seventy Years On* (Solihull: Helion & Company, 2016), p. xv-xvi.

<sup>17</sup> Despite its anachronism as a viable form of commercial agriculture, peak usage of the phrase “market garden” occurred in English in 1947, undoubtedly due to the release of this film. This also explains why French usage of the English phrase “market garden”, having been practically non-existent up to this point, suddenly spikes; and moreover spikes at nearly four times the percentage that it did in its English usage. This suggests that its influence not only spread across the channel, but was amplified in the process (Google Ngram, 2016). Alan Esler Smith and David Truesdale, *Theirs is the Glory: Arnhem, Hurst and Conflict on Film* (Solihull: Helion and Company, p. 2016), p. 164. ‘Market Garden’ [French], *Google Ngram*, Web, 18 November 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Graham Webster, ‘History of the British Inter-Services Security Board and the Allocation of Code-Names in the Second World War’, *Intelligence and National Security*, 29:5, (2014), p. 752.

idealised pastoral image of life back home, and this contrasts comically with the carnage that the Allies were hoping to rain down on their unsuspecting adversaries. Moreover, since no one who made this juxtaposition could be accused of being schmaltzy, the codename subtly defends its sappy nostalgia from irony. It would have allowed homesick troops to draw comfort and strength from a sentimental image, while reemphasising soldierly sadism to protect it from the emasculating charge of mawkishness.

As it turned out, the discreet bluster of this particular cryptonym backfired. A mission named after a picturesque gardening technique was never going to be comically invulnerable, since one possible outcome might be thousands of dead soldiers fertilising for the Dutch countryside. The punchline of one joke, “this gardening technique is unlike military violence”, became the set up for a very different one. The mission was a disaster; and like Beckett’s Market Garden Organisation, Operation Market Garden converted human beings into their agricultural potential. This is agonisingly comic partly because power has shifted unexpectedly from the joke-teller to the butt of the joke; but that would not be so funny were it not for the huge human cost involved. Sigmund Freud argues in *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905) that the ‘yield of pleasure [in humour] corresponds to the psychical expenditure that is saved’.<sup>19</sup> In this case, then, the silly *Schadenfreude* of a codename has relieved us of the inconvenience of having to think about so much violence and misery. A trivial punchline, “those responsible for this cleverly sentimental/sadistic codename are less clever than they believed”, has been made to stand for thousands of people killing each other in the mud.

This is the type of a certain kind of comedy in *Molloy*. The more psychic work that the object of the joke would normally entail, the more insignificance its form of

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<sup>19</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Harmondsworth, 1976 [1905]), p. 167.

presentation must be. When the object is fascism, the innuendoes have to be almost undetectable. When Moran asks, ‘Who did you think [the bicycle] was for, [...] Goering?’, the catalyst is nothing more than the reader’s surprise at encountering an unmistakable historical detail in a text that appeared to have expunged them (*Mo*, 137). There is only the faintest trace of the joke structure that characterised even the wan gag about Operation Market Garden. The reader has been misdirected, and the reveal brings about an unexpected shift in power. The lineaments are there, but they are vanishingly unfunny. Moran’s choice of tippie, ‘Wallenstein’s’ lager, named after a trilogy of plays by Schiller with no relation to Beckett’s novel, is such a vacuous invocation of the German word for ‘camp’ that it might even be an accident (*Mo*, 93). Ballyba’s ‘Market Garden Organisation’, a bureaucratic organ charged with converting human waste into fertiliser like its namesake mission, conforms to this paradigm so unerringly that Beckett may have even taken it as a model. It is unlikely, however, that the “economics” of this joke struck him with such force that he decided to reproduce it in an extended metaphor about the economic circulation of said waste. We will have to go into another philological nicety for an explanation of that.

The O.M. is presided over by a senior bureaucrat called ‘the Odibil’. Van Hulle spots a discrepancy in the spelling of ‘Odibil’ across the notebook, partial typescript and published novel: in the latter two he is ‘the Obidil’, but in the former he is ‘the Odibil’ (Van Hulle 2014, 27). The slightness of this change suggests a motive. Beckett has moved away from a total inversion, or “heteropalindrome”, and towards an anagrammic rearrangement. He had used mirror writing extensively in *Watt*, but repetition is not in itself enough of a reason for Beckett to have baulked at it. The shift might then be about what each spelling signifies: one is a perfect cancellation of “libido”, as in Knott’s need ‘not to need’, the other is a “disordering”, both lexical and conceptual, of that aspiration (*Wa*, 203).

Laura Salisbury sees this as part of Beckett's parody of capitalist efficiency, though it is a politically questionable one if so. Using Freud, Salisbury associates Beckett's anagrammic scrambling of libido with the 'collocation of the anal and the erotic' in Ballyba's economy (Salisbury 2012, 99). Freud believed that anal eroticism in adults is the result of a "disordered" libido ('a regressive debasement'), so this reading is not implausible. Furthermore, if "libido" has been lexically disordered, perhaps "Ballyba" has too: are its citizens "all baby"? The variant passage might then be a joke on what Sandor Ferenczi calls 'the ontogenesis of the interest in money', with the truck and barter of economic life desublimated and everyone hellishly mired in an undifferentiated slop of exchange-values, anticipating *How It Is* (1964) [1961] and the circulation of tortured bodies driven on by their 'united net sufferings'. The political problem with this reading is that the idea of anal eroticism as a "disorder" (i.e. an anagram) of libido is, quite straightforwardly, shit.<sup>20</sup>

Returning to O'Reilly's argument, then, we might note that such an 'ablation of desire' had been a pet theme of Beckett's since *Proust* (1930), where he names Brahma alongside Leopardi as one of its two 'sages'.<sup>21</sup> As Lidan Lin points out, Beckett has made a mistake here: Brahma is not a 'sage' but a deity.<sup>22</sup> There is little evidence that Beckett was directly influenced by the Upanishads, as Thirthankar Chakraborty notes, and this error would seem to suggest he was not.<sup>23</sup> A number of critics, including Paul Davies and Ulrich Potheast, have discussed the connection nevertheless.<sup>24</sup> For my argument, it

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<sup>20</sup> Freud, 'On Transformations in Instinct as Exemplified in Anal Eroticism', in James Strachey (ed. and trans.), *The Standard Edition of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. VII (London: Vintage, 2001), p. 299. Sandor Ferenczi, 'On the Ontogenesis of the Interest in Money', in *First Contributions to Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Ernest Jones (London: Karnac Books, 1994), p. 319. Beckett, *How It Is: A Critical-Genetic Edition*, ed. Edouard Magessa O'Reilly (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 171.

<sup>21</sup> Beckett, 'Three Dialogues with George Duthuit', in *Proust and Three Dialogues with George Duthuit* (London: John Calder, 1969), p. 18.

<sup>22</sup> Lidan Lin, 'Samuel Beckett's Encounter with the East', *English Studies*, Vol. 91, No. 6, 2010, Web, 18 November 2016, p. 631.

<sup>23</sup> Thirthankar Chakraborty, 'The Metempsychotic Birds: An Exploration of Samuel Beckett's Allusions to the Upanishads', *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2015, Web, 18 November 2016, p. 84.

<sup>24</sup> Paul Davies, *Beckett and Eros: Death of Humanism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), p. 161. Ulrich Potheast, *The Metaphysical Vision: Arthur Schopenhauer's Philosophy of Art and Life and Samuel Beckett's Own Way to Make Use of It* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), p. 69.

is preferable to imagine that Beckett was invoking 'Brahma' and 'Om' in a second-hand way, firstly as dilettantish fawning to Schopenhauer, and later as a partial repudiation of it. Schopenhauer did, however, probably introduce Beckett directly to the Vedantic tradition of Hinduism. Christopher Janaway has enumerated the many parallels between Vedanta and Schopenhauer, some of which make themselves felt in Beckett's earlier writing. Chief among them is that 'Brahman alone is real' and 'the world (together with empirical egos) [...] is an illusion (Maya)'; for Schopenhauer 'the will as thing-in-itself alone is real' and 'the world [...] considered distinct from the will as thing-in-itself is illusion'.<sup>25</sup>

In Vedanta, the *pratima* 'Om' signifies Brahman, 'the substratum and the structure [of reality]'; Brahma, whose four faces are symbolised by the Swastika, is the creator God of that denuded reality.<sup>26</sup> If Beckett's 'Om' is alluding to the Vedantic tradition of Hinduism, its meaning in Ballyba suggests a change of heart about Eastern quietism. Having once revered the ablation of desire and its metaphysical compensations, Beckett now appears to be more circumspect about it. Brahman and its unlibidinous sages are (at least nominally) implicated in the very thing they were supposed to transcend, the everyday shit of bureaucracy, social status etc. The O.M., a bureaucratic apparatus responsible for collecting that shit, stands in the same relation to its citizens as Brahman does to Maya. Or to revert to Beckett's preferred point of reference, Ballyba and its citizens are respectively the will as thing-in-itself and the will's phenomena.

Schopenhauer's exemplary case of the latter is 'the individual's body' (Schopenhauer 2008, 329). From the standpoint of the will, individual bodies are essentially excrement, as Schopenhauer gleefully writes in Book 4 of Volume 1 of *The World as*

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<sup>25</sup> Christopher Janaway, *The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 183.

<sup>26</sup> George A. Vensus, *Brahmaanubhava* (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2001), p. 30.

*Will and Presentation* (1818); the former is an imperishable motive force, the latter is an impermanent, endlessly replaceable ‘case’:

From this standpoint, it [...] appears just as perverse to demand continuation of one’s individual case, which is replaced by other individuals, as to demand permanence of the matter of one’s body, which is constantly replaced by new; it appears just as foolish to embalm the body as it would be carefully to preserve its excrement. (Schopenhauer 2008, 328-9)

The individual under the Ballyba regime, or indeed any being prey to the *principium individuationis*, is in a situation analogous to that of ‘the turd waiting for the flush’, as Moran delicately expresses it (*Mo*, 156). The state, or the will as thing-in-itself, is the lavatory in this formula. It is a grim but aptly comic picture of the Schopenhauerian noumenon, bringing out the lenient otherworldliness of that concept with a healthy dose of scatological realism. As a vision of a state’s relationship to its citizens, however, it is more unsettling. The Ballyba economy hoovers up the euphemised aggregate product of its citizens, who are regarded as shit, only to spew them back out again as use-values, the agricultural output they themselves valorise, to keep the system churning. If this is ‘a parody [...] of a smoothly functioning capitalist economy’, it is an even darker one than Salisbury suggests, more in keeping with the allusions to corrupt authoritarian bureaucracies and state surveillance than with normalised capitalism.

This is not to say there are not similarities with the cruel ‘retentive economic policies’ of protectionist Ireland, as Morin and Winstanley suggest, or indeed the bureaucracy-heavy, *dirigiste* model of capitalism Beckett was acquainted with from his time in France. There are, and this is what probably made the passage too historically suggestive to include. There are too many hints that Ballyba is one or both kinds of totalitarian bureaucracy, muddled with a reciprocal metaphor that makes the state’s ruthless indifference to its citizens stand for the individual’s predicament in a Schopenhauerian universe, and vice versa. I am not, of course, suggesting that Beckett intended to point out the similarities between facile orientalised quietism and fascist exploitation, or between fascist exploitation and common or garden capitalism. The



opposite is true. If Beckett did not want to imbalance the precarious comic economy of flippant innuendos and horrifying, otherwise unspoken referents, he had to be careful with further possible resonances. This is a novel that has already animadverted to ‘the celebrated whiff of almonds’, Zyklon-B, the cyanide-based pesticide used to murder a million people the Nazis regarded as *ballastexistenzen*, “waste-lives” (*Mo*, 49).<sup>27</sup> Mania Péron, whose husband Alfred died as a result of his incarceration in the Mauthausen-Gusen concentration camp, was in a good position to criticise any clunky allegories.<sup>28</sup> This may explain the ferocity of Moran’s insistence, in the published text, that he will tell us ‘nothing. Nothing’ about ‘the source of Ballyba’s prosperity’ (Beckett, 2009b, 129). Beckett might be furious with himself for breaking his own ‘image ban’ on the holocaust (Adorno, 1973, 401).<sup>29</sup>

There is a clash here, as I have begun to suggest, with the quietist economies of the earlier work. Structurally speaking, Ballyba’s economy is no different from Knott’s household, ‘to which nothing could be added’ and ‘from which nothing could be taken away’ (*Wa*, 111). Just as Knott’s leftovers must be eliminated, Ballyba’s economy does not tolerate waste *as* waste. In both cases, everything that is produced must be fed back into the system, so that it is able to close and the inputs and outputs remain in a sustainable, self-regulating equilibrium. Like the ‘contrapuntal forces that undo themselves’ in Beckett’s drama, the best of all possible distributions cancels out supply and demand and approximates nothingness (‘for the only way one can speak of nothing is to speak of it as though it were something...’ (*Wa*, 64)).<sup>30</sup> This is not just a happy marriage of theodicy and quietism, it is Beckett’s model for literary creativity for much

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<sup>27</sup> John Felstiner points this out in a discussion of Paul Celan’s 1952 poem ‘Count up the almonds’. “*Ballastexistenzen*” literally means “ballast existences”, in the etymological sense of “ballast”: “load”, “cargo” (OED Online 2017). The sense is, gruesomely, of something that sits heavily on the digestion; “fibre”, “roughage”. ‘Ballyba’, “Ball-y-ba”, probably plays on this ambiguity, suggesting an almost cannibalistic churn of production and consumption. John Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 64.

<sup>28</sup> C. J. Ackerley and Stanley Gontarski, *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett: A Reader’s Guide to His Works, Life, and Thought* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), p. 432.

<sup>29</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1973), p. 401.

<sup>30</sup> Andrea Oppo, *Philosophical Aesthetics and Samuel Beckett* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008), p. 161.

of the 1930s. In October 1932, for example, he writes to Thomas MacGreevy that composition ought to be ‘a spontaneous combustion of the spirit to compensate the pus & pain that threatens its economy’ (*LSB 1*, 134). It must not be ‘the fraudulent manoeuvres’ to make the ‘cavity’ do what it can’t, ‘the work of the abscess’, a protective exudation that the body accomplishes without premeditated thought (*LSB 1*, 134-5). The spiritual economy, a cavity or internal negative equilibrium, spontaneously combusts to make up for an imbalance created, tautologically, by the pain of imbalance. This, for Beckett, is where poetry ought to be ‘useful’, ‘in the depths where supply and demand coincide, and the prayer is god’, as he writes to MacGreevy again in 1935 (*LSB 1*, 274). The experience of lyrical disinhibition, the simultaneity or single-movement of impression and expression, supply and demand, was once religiously important. Why does the Beckett of Ballyba seem to think it is shit? How and why does he move away from this conception of ‘personal and aesthetic equilibrium’, as Mark Nixon puts it, and towards an aesthetics that could ‘accommodate the mess’ of intractable imbalance, or what *Watt* calls the ‘pre-established arbitrary’ (*Wa*, 114)?<sup>31</sup>

The longest variant passage in the 1945 typescript of *Watt* concerns the problem of Mr Knott’s dinner. Having arrived at Knott’s establishment as an aspirant to his master’s condition of recognised anhedonia, Watt is set to work in his capacity as a domestic servant, one of those “invisible hands” that maintain the smooth running of a household, or *oikos*, from which the word “economy” derives (OED Online 2016). His most time-consuming responsibility is to make sure that under no circumstances is there any waste from Mr Knott’s dinner. This is because, in a misleading use of the past conditional, or an incomplete use of the conditional perfect, ‘nothing could be added’ to Knott’s establishment and ‘nothing taken away’. Waste is anathema because it is supposedly a closed system with equal inputs and output, so, like shit in Ballyba, it must be transformed into something usable and fed back into the economy. Watt’s

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<sup>31</sup> Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett’s German Diaries 1936–1937* (London: Continuum, 2011), p. 37. Tom Driver, ‘Beckett by the Madeleine’, *Columbia University Forum*, IV, 1961, p. 125.

difficulties in this undertaking arise from the fact that Knott's appetite is radically unpredictable; '[f]or it was more usual for Mr Knott to eat all his food than to eat only a part, and to eat only a part than to eat none at all' (*Wa*, 76). One-eighth of the published text consists of Watt's attempt to compensate for this fluctuation in "demand" (*Wa*, 72-99). Knott's waste is essentially a transferrable unit of probability, or "risk". Considered as a part of his establishment, it is what prevents the system from closing, from being a self-regulating equilibrium, like the economy of Ballyba.

The waste, converted into a unit of probability, undergoes several transformations, passing ever further away from Knott's household, posing ever less risk to the putative closure and equilibrium of his system. At the first remove, the probability that there is waste is converted into the probability of a dog existing to eat it. The dog bears all the risk in this situation. However, since it is hardly probable that a dog exists in a sufficiently hopeless state of inanition that it will faithfully show up every day whether there is food-waste or not, and furthermore be relied upon not to perish of hunger between meals, the risk is in grave danger of being transferred back to the Knott establishment. The responsibility for the dog is therefore transferred to a third party, 'an unmistakeable specimen of local indigent proliferation' (*Wa*, 84). But this specimen is unlikely to consent to take on the burden of the risk without a good incentive. The probability that there will be waste is at this point monetised in the form of a 'small initial lump sum to be paid down and by a liberal annual pension to be paid monthly', 'occasional seasonable gifts [...] and untiring well-timed affectionate words of advice and encouragement and consolation' to ensure loyalty, and so on (*Wa*, 83). This does a good deal to make up for the uncertainty of whether and how much dinner Knott should waste. However, it does not entirely efface the risk of both dog and owner failing to show up, since they themselves are subject to their own uncertain variables. No matter how loyally they attempt to make themselves self-regulating closed-systems in the image of Knott's household, ensuring their inputs and outputs stay in a healthy and sustainable equilibrium, they are still unfortunately subject to the unpredictable

duration of the human and canine lifespans. So the probability of death must be off-set by the existence of a series of back-up starving dogs and local penurious men. Reproduction becomes something like an insurance policy, a serial fail-safe protecting Knott's household from the unpredictability of his own appetite. In *Watt*, unlike in *Murphy*, 'the quantum of wantum' does in fact vary. This is why, despite all of Watt's ingenuity, he is unable to force 'humanity' to be Wylie's 'well with two buckets'.<sup>32</sup> There is an inherent disequilibrium in Knott's household, and the uncertainty it is subject to is merely displaced outside it. This apparently closed system, 'from which nothing could be added' and 'nothing taken away', is overtly not one. Nor does it become one, in the published text, by extending its reach into the local economy, incorporating a colony of famished dogs and a thousand-year dynasty of entrepreneurial inbreeding peasants.

What's more, the Lynches are in fact unable to get their population to stabilise – at a total age of 'a thousand years!', surely ridiculing the Nazi millennium of which this gruesome dynasty might be a Dorian Gray-like eugenic mirror image (*Wa*, 88). In a set-piece which crosses the rostering of antediluvian patriarchs in Genesis with a kind of Malthusian freak-show, equilibrium is shown to be an impossible aim, even when its imperative is spread out so finely across the economy that all living things register – are themselves merely registers of – the imbalances of that original requirement (*Wa*, 84-99). The lives and deaths of individuals are like ripples radiating out from a central point of disturbance (which, in a fairly standard metaphysical twist, is the fiat that there must be no disturbance). The necessity of equilibrium spreads out under the force of its own impossibility, incorporating ever-new objects in the attempt to correct for its most recent failure to achieve an end-state equilibrium. Life itself, the conditions of possibility of reproduction, looks from this angle like an ineluctable form of "market correction", just as "market correction" comes to look like a natural phenomenon. It is

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<sup>32</sup> Beckett, *Murphy*, ed. J. C. C. Mays (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 2009), pp. 38-9.

at this point in the published text that the matter of Knott's dinner finally trails off, or rather 'melt[s] away', leaving the Lynches to balance the books, not in household inputs and outputs, which have been exhaustively underwritten, but in a ledger of births and deaths (*Wa*, 99).

In the 1945 typescript Mr Knott's waste-disposal problem is continued for a further 8,300 words, making it the longest continuous variant passage by a significant margin.<sup>33</sup> With a kennel of dogs now at their disposal, the Lynches are obliged by the law of equilibrium to put them to some use. If they did not, the reserve army of dogs would themselves become the latest in the series of transformations of Knott's waste, since only one dog is in "circulation" at any given time. In the typescript, 'the Quin [Knott] or Lynch spectacle', so named because the narrator is unable to ascertain who was responsible for it, makes up for this slack (Beckett, 1945, 297). After a brief digression on the breeds and sexual predilections of the dogs in question, the passage commences:

It was from such simple erotic data as these that was evolved a spectacle whose naked grandeur, in order to be believed, required to be seen, and whose appeal to all classes and conditions of men and women, [...] none will credit who did not witness. (Beckett 1945, 277)

This populist 'spectacle' is more than adverbially naked. On an approximately biannual basis, with up to 400 people in attendance, between 2 and 21 ('or even more') of the Lynch's dogs are called upon to participate in a dizzyingly complex, ever-changing, algebraically worked-out orgy (Beckett 1945, 284).<sup>34</sup> This is organised by three of the senior Lynches, Joe, Jim and Bill, who are known as 'the promoters' (Beckett 1945,

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<sup>33</sup> There are 20 full A4 pages and 2 half pages. Paragraphs are long with 12 exceptions of between 1 and 3 lines. There is 1 conversation of 3 lines, and 1 equation which takes up 2 lines. There are few strikethroughs (3 words on one of my randomly picked sample pages, 7 on the other). There are approximately 12 words a line and 34 lines a page. Deducting 15 lines for short paragraphs and conversations/equations, and 22 x 5 for strikethroughs, the total word count of this passage is approximately 8,278 words.

<sup>34</sup> The standard rate of admission is calculated to allow a maximum attendance of exactly 400 spectators (240 pennies = 1 pound, 10 pounds = 2400 pennies, 2400 / 6 = 400).

289).<sup>35</sup> The 'spectators' surround a 'roped-off ring' in which the dogs are to perform, standing or sitting on boxes and crates of various sizes (Beckett 1945, 279). The degree of ceremony involved is akin to that of a state event. A priest 'blesses' the dogs before 'the performance'. There is a 'parade' in which the dogs, accompanied by 'kennelmen' and 'kennelmaidens' adorned with tokens of natural fecundity, are led round the ring (Beckett 1945, 287). When the 'excitement is at its climax', 'a cry goes up [...] towards heaven' and the orgy begins. Inspired by their canine counterparts, the kennelmen and maidens also 'form couples' and participate in an analogous 'jig':

a stately Irish jig, in and out among the jiggling dogs till the ring was a riot of dancing shapes, or dancing colours, [...] tossing blossoms and flowers, or tossing leaves and berries, and dancing and tossing in and out, and to and fro, to the music that Mr Green was extracting from his instrument to the best of his ability, amidst the cries of the spectators, cries of sympathy, of encouragement and even of empathy. (Beckett 1945, 278)

The spectators themselves seem to get carried away by this Pagan frenzy of flying berries and interpenetrating shapes and colours, crying out not only with 'encouragement' and 'sympathy' but with 'empathy' too. The implication that they are indeed more than voyeurs in this 'pageant' is strengthened by the 'sudden[ness]' with which everyone is possessed by a regretful fatigue, *post coitum omne animal triste est*, filing out of the venue 'as they had come', a pun that is hardly beneath Beckett's customary register of humour (Beckett 1945, 288).<sup>36</sup>

The 'promoters' alternate between orgies in which the number of female dog participants is even and those in which it is odd. The reason given for this is the 'taste' of the spectators which, in accordance with the principle of equilibrium, is evenly split between the two (Beckett 1945, 293). On even days, the logic of equilibrium closes the

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<sup>35</sup> Bill Lynch, like William Beckett, dies age 63, leaving the family business to his son Sam, who 'declined' his 'promotorship', 'saying, I am not worthy to be a promoter, and, I have no time to be a promoter'. While 'Art' and 'Con' also decline their promotorships, 'Frank' accepts his, saying that 'to fill a vacancy of such a kind was an honour to which no man, and he least of all, could remain insensible' (Beckett 1945, 290).

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, *All That Fall* (1957): 'I'm coming, Mrs Rooney, I'm coming, give me time, I'm as stiff as yourself'. Beckett, *All That Fall*, in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Dramatic Works*, 3rd ed. (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 2006), p. 178.

system of its own accord: every dog is able to pair off according to its lights and the variable of Knott's waste is eliminated. It ascends with the cry of pleasure to heaven, when the 'patience' of the crowd is finally 'rewarded' and the 'value for money obtained' (Beckett 1945, 283). Knott's need for nothing, negative equilibrium, has been fulfilled through the cancellation of opposite forces, means and ends, or 'demand and supply'. On odd days, however, the waste is transformed into the solitary figure of an 'Irish Setter female dog' – Beckett strikes out 'bitch' in a rare preterition of casual chauvinism – who is initially left out of the fun (Beckett 1945, 292):

She cast wildly wildly round [sic], not quite knowing quite what she ought to do, and incapable of doing nothing. For how could she do nothing – put yourself in her place – with all that was going on about her? (Beckett 1945, 292)

This unfortunate dog embodies the intractability of waste, or the remainder, in a dialectic of equilibrium. I call this a dialectic because of its structural similarity to Theodor Adorno's dialectic of concept and object. This dialectic, he writes, 'says no more, to begin with, than that objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder, that they come to contradict the traditional norm of adequacy. [...] [Contradiction] indicates the untruth of identity, the fact that the concept does not exhaust the thing conceived' (Adorno 1973, 5). Adorno identifies the point of contact between his philosophy of the remainder and the economic logic of equilibrium in his 'Notes on *The Unnamable*'. Tellingly he arrives at the notion of "waste" or 'filth' as well:

[t]he p[hilosophy of the remainder] says: what remains for me after the deduction of all costs, trimmings, advertising as absolute certainty – consciousness as property, the secret of mineness [*Jemeinigkeit*], which not for nothing sounds like meanness [*Gemeinheit*]. In B[eckett] that becomes, sardonically: how can I ligate everything that exists and also myself? (This is thought in accordance with the capitalist market, which B[eckett] takes at its word.) Answer: by turning myself into a negative quantity, into less than nothing (filth and stump are less than a remnant).<sup>37</sup>

Knott's wasted dinner and shit in Ballyba are examples of this filthy 'quantity', which the dialectic of equilibrium attempts to clear up. Up to now in the *Watt* typescript, the

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<sup>37</sup> Adorno, 'Notes on Beckett', trans. Dirk Van Hulle and Shane Weller, *Journal of Beckett Studies* 19.2, 2010, p. 173.

dialectic has failed, as it always does in empirical conditions, because equilibrium is dynamic: it has obligingly tilted one way or another, due to the unpredictability of Knott's appetite, the unpredictability of the lifespans of dogs and people in conditions of subsistence, and so on. This theoretically endless process has incorporated more and more participants and objects in the Knott economy, each one of which imperfectly cancels out another, generating more oppositions in a dynamic approximation of perfect balance, or what Knott prefers to think of as 'nothing'. But here a moment has arrived where the problem of equilibrium cannot be shunted onto another iteration of itself. The dialectical principle that gives rise to the endless proliferation of imperfectly cancelling opposites has taken corporeal form, and it is a horny quadruped, but it is really still the unpredictability of Knott's appetite transformed into waste. She/it stands outside a system whose closure and boundedness depends on the existence of that outside to counterbalance it, an outside into which the system can emanate or unfold to protect its internal negative equilibrium, like 'the work of the abscess' protecting the 'cavity' by 'compensat[ing] the pus & the pain that threatens its economy'. But now the hour has come in which for some reason that aesthetic dialectic is not allowed to continue. A being endowed with desire and a modicum of intelligence is 'incapable of doing nothing'. Every dog has its day. What did this one do?

she did the only thing [...] that she could do, she joined union with a union with any union [sic], with the first union that came by, forming two unions, for whereas unions normally constituted cannot exceed in number one half of the total number of units involved, on the other hand units constituted in this way, that is to say, concatenationalistically, or train unions, do not require, for their accomplishment, more than one unit more than the number of unions projected, which represents a great economy of units, or a great gain in unions... (Beckett 1945, 292-3)

We are told that the promoter's 'end' was to attain 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number', so it is fitting that this inadvertent parody of political economy bears an uncanny resemblance to the rambling style of Jeremy Bentham (Beckett 1945, 286).<sup>38</sup> Secreted in this parody, however, the solitary female Irish setter has achieved

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<sup>38</sup> E.g. 'Our maximum principle, in demanding the greatest possible happiness among men, demands [...] also by itself its distribution among men [...] and determines at the same time as



something philosophically obscene. To use Kantian terminology, she has de-positing the 'limit' that constitutes its infinite overcoming. Briefly, a Kantian 'limit' is distinguished from a Kantian 'boundary'. '[B]oundaries', writes Kant in his *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (1783), 'always presuppose a space existing outside a certain definite place and inclosing it; limits do not require this, but are mere negations which affect a quantity insofar as it is not absolutely complete'.<sup>39</sup> Knott's *oikos*, if it really was the closed system it purported to be, would be an example of a bounded entity: for it to be true that 'nothing could be added' or 'taken away', there must be an enclosed space where those immutable quantities exist, and for there to be an enclosed space there must be a space outside of it. By contrast, the problem of equilibrium to which Knott's leaky establishment gives rise is an example of a limit. As Gillian Rose explains, 'Kant's limit implies [...] a perpetual raising above the limit which by that very act recreates the limit'.<sup>40</sup> The example Kant gives of a limit in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) is a mathematical series.<sup>41</sup> The series has a limit but that limit is infinitely receding: there is nothing outside it but its own potential unfolding. This is what the principle of equilibrium, left to run its own infinite course, would be doing. But the dog/waste interrupts this infinite generation of imbalances by de-positing Kant's limit, which would seem to mean reverting to his boundary. Here is the obscenity. Jamming Knott's dialectic of imperfectly cancelling opposites whose driving principle she herself embodies, the solitary female Irish setter becomes a kind of binding force that yokes

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the correct distribution the one which is the condition of that maximum [...]. The greatest possible product belong always to one mode of division. If I divide, e.g., twelve into 1 and 11, the product of the parts is 11; if I divide 2 and 10 it is greater, to wit 20; if divided into 3 and 9 again greater, to wit 27, and so on. The most favourable division is the one in equal parts, to wit 6 and 6; this gives the maximum product 36. If a division not into 2 but into 3 parts be concerned, the here equal parts, 4, 4, 4, would equally give the maximum product, to wit 64. And thus in general with any magnitude of the number or number of parts, which one might choose, *the equal division is the most favourable for the attainment of the highest product*'. Quoted in Werner Stark, 'Liberty and Equality or: Jeremy Bentham as an Economist', in Bhikhu C. Parekh (ed.), *Jeremy Bentham: Critical Assessments, Vol. 4* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 106.

<sup>39</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, trans. Paul Carus (Chicago: Open Court, 1997), p. 122.

<sup>40</sup> Gillian Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology* (London: Athlone Press, 1981), p. 203.

<sup>41</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 108.

together multiple canine ‘unions’. She does this by facilitating ‘train unions’ which, concatenating, form a circle. The dogs no longer have any need for ‘the ring’: they are, so to speak, the ring in itself. This means that there is no longer an enclosed space, like the closed system Knott’s household is supposed to be, in which an equal and opposite number of ‘units’ or forces cancel each other out. Nor is there an outside space into which the system must infinitely expand in order to counterbalance the ineluctable precipitate or waste-product of those cancellations.

On even days, what was outside the ring was the infinity to which the stipulation of equilibrium gives rise, a never-ending multiplication of identities and values, an unclosable system. “Outside of here it’s life”, might be an apt formulation. On odd days, there is nothing outside the system. Everything has been integrated in it. Inputs and outputs, supply and demand are perfectly identified in a self-regulating equilibrium. There is, in a word, no waste. Like the economy of Ballyba, where waste is absorbed back into the churn of production and consumption, nothing is allowed to be leftover or left out. Knott’s waste, in all its transformations, has met the fate of shit in Ballyba. Equilibrium has prevailed, not as a dialectic but as an end to it; and static equilibrium, as Knott nominally demonstrates, is the negation of whatever is being equalised. Beckett has followed the logic of equilibrium to its endpoint, where to be ‘levelled off’ means to be ‘literally exterminated’ (‘not an atom remained’), and where the ‘pure identity’ of ‘absolute integration’ is organised ‘death’ or ‘genocide’ (Adorno 1973, 355).

In *Samuel Beckett’s German Diaries 1936-1937* (2011), Mark Nixon writes that Beckett found ‘the Jungian notion that the tendency of energy towards an end-state of equilibrium explains behaviour better than the causal-mechanical explanations of Freud and Adler’ (Nixon 2011, 40). ‘After the instability and wildness of *Dream*’, Nixon continues, ‘there is a movement within Beckett’s work towards a “truce”, a personal and aesthetic equilibrium that might counter the growing disorientation’ (Nixon 2011, 37).

Beckett himself thinks of equilibrium in economic terms as the sublime of creativity, writing that ‘a poem’ ought to be like being ‘useful in the depths where demand and supply coincide, and the prayer is god’. We might therefore conclude from the passages expelled from *Watt* and *Molloy* that Beckett was beginning to have misgivings about the kind of god to which this prayer was equivalent. As Molloy insightfully remarks, ‘the whole thing is to know what saint to implore, any fool can implore him’ (*Mo*, 23).

These grisly meditations on the imperative to make demand and supply coincide, to eliminate waste and create a perfect self-regulating equilibrium, suggest that it was no longer an aesthetic model Beckett felt quite so spiritually unambivalent about. Indeed it would have been difficult to be, for a person exposed to the ‘political and historical assertions [Beckett] encountered in Nazi Germany’, chief among which was the notion of ‘a new harmony’, a society ‘transformed’ in nature’s image of ‘balance or equilibrium’ (Nixon 2011, 178).<sup>42</sup> While the ragbag of deictic markers in both variant passages make it difficult to situate either in a single context, they are not sufficiently ‘unworlded’, to use a Heideggerian term, to ignore the biting historical parallels they themselves, with varying degrees of explicitness, invoke (‘a thousand years’, the ‘whiff of almonds’ etc.).<sup>43</sup> This is one explanation for their omission from the published texts. As well as wanting to avoid overcooking the historical innuendos, Beckett may have hoped to spare his readers the unedifying spectacle of an author laboriously working out his objections to an aesthetic philosophy made untenable by anything as obviously wrong as National Socialism. If that obviousness is not as obvious as it was in 1945 or 1947, then we have good reason to look at and appreciate these passages anew.

Both jettisoned passages are tryingly long, dense and difficult relative to the surface triviality of their subject matter. The effort of writing them, and of reading them, is

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<sup>42</sup> Yannis Stavrakakis, ‘Green Fantasy and the Real of Nature: Elements of a Lacanian Critique of Green Ideological Discourse’, *Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture and Society*, 2:1, 1997, p. 127. Thomas Brockelman, *Žižek and Heidegger: The Question Concerning Techno-Capitalism* (London: Continuum, 2008), p. 30.

<sup>43</sup> Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time*, trans. Theodore Kisiel (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 168.

disproportionate to the meanings they contain; and this of course becomes central to their meaning. Like a joke whose punchline is a deliberate let-down, they only conform to Freud's economic joke logic at the second remove (i.e. the 'yield of pleasure [from humour] corresponds to the psychical expenditure that is saved' (Freud 1976, 167)). In other words they are uneconomical: the excess or surplus of form over content is wasteful, and it is this wastefulness, a mirror of the content of both passages, that is the joke. They conform to Freud because after a certain point every word is a wasted one, and, in the context of a joke where waste is the punchline, every additional word-waste is hyperbolically economic. Neoclassical theory would call this a low, indeed almost vanishingly low, "marginal cost of production". Once the premise (i.e. the initial layout of joke-capital) is set up, it produces humour practically for free. And this freedom makes laughing at humans as fertiliser, or at bestiality and incestuous paedophilic group-sex as a metaphor for the elimination of human waste in a totalitarian closed system, infinitely too easy, since it shouldn't be easy at all. Nothing and infinity are in an asymptotic relation, here, as they are in the Knott-Lynch economy: the expectation that *nothing* is funny (about regarding human beings as waste) makes a joke about exorbitant wastefulness *infinitely* funny, or at least infinitely easy to be laughed at, and therefore infinitely, because not just humanly, bad. This is a way of getting the true measure of the horror both economies are apparently making light of. In this sense they are representational economies. They have an object and they are representing it, however palimpsestically, through an economy of waste and costlessness (Freud's economising humour). It so happens that they also represent or objectify the representational technique they are using, namely the economics of equilibrium. I would interpret this as a parting indictment of that technique and, implicitly, the economic model that it uses.

In the Knott-Lynch economy it is the attempt to reach nothing, through the cancellation of opposites, that generates all this ethically damningly hilarious literary waste. The bad imaginarieness of equilibrium is responsible for Beckett's creativity. It is

only by positing equilibrium, like positing a Kantian limit, that it can be productively defaulted on, and accrue to everything forever. In my epigraph Simone Weil does not say it is wrong to be bad; indeed in the same book she writes that beyond badness ‘is the stage where evil becomes innocent’ (Weil 2002, 79). She is certainly not saying it shouldn’t be imagined (‘[o]nly imaginary good does not project [evil]’, Weil adds, which is *really* bad (Weil 2002, 102)). For the Beckett of *Watt* and *Molloy*, it was essential to aim for equilibrium in order to fail at it better. It is only when the products of failures of equilibrium are regarded as waste, as remainders that threaten the closure and equilibrium of the system, that the concept of equilibrium becomes unimaginably bad, rather than bad because it is imaginary. It is probably not a coincidence that the deictic markers in the Ballyba section point to war and fascism, where life is valued least and waste acquires new value in the form of disposable conscripts and camp labourers and *ballastexistenzen*. Ballyba’s perfectly efficient effluent economy, where waste is no longer tolerated as waste but must be eliminated by means of technology and ideology, so that the inputs and outputs remain in equilibrium and the system can close, is a perfect example of unimaginably bad equilibrium, for the reason that disequilibrium is no longer regarded as an imaginable scenario.

There is no criticism on the “dog orgy” in the *Watt* typescript, though Chris Ackerley does mention its existence in passing in an entry on the ‘saga of the famished dog’ in *Obscure Locks, Simple Keys: The Annotated Watt* (2005).<sup>44</sup> The point of reference he uses there is Kant’s hypothetical imperative, which Beckett came across in the second English edition of Wilhelm Windelband’s *History of Philosophy* (1901) in the following form: ‘If you will this or that, then you must proceed thus or so’.<sup>45</sup> This is a pithy way of saying that, in contrast to the unconditional (i.e. infinite) categorical imperative, which

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<sup>44</sup> Ackerley, *Obscure Locks, Simple Keys: The Annotated Watt* (Edinburgh: Journal of Beckett Studies Books, 2005), p. 108.

<sup>45</sup> Wilhelm Windelband, *History of Philosophy, With Especial Reference to the Formation and Development of Its Problems and Conceptions*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1901), p. 552.

must be followed without regard to the individual's will or any ends whatsoever, there is a second class of moral proposition which represents 'the practical necessity of a possible action as means to something else that is willed (or at least which one might possibly will)' (*Groundwork*, 294).<sup>46</sup> This has the curious effect of inverting normal causality, so that an end, a definite or finite aim, such as explaining the disappearance of Mr Knott's food from the bowl left outside overnight, retroactively calls into existence a means, such as the interminable Lynches and their colony of dogs. The hypothetical imperative, which asks us to act morally given that we will have desired a particular end, is elided with the categorical imperative, which blankly requires us to act in a particular way independent of our wills. '[T]he simple statement "it was necessary"' – a categorical statement – 'beget[s]' innumerable 'premises' which, moving from the hypothetical to the actual, 'finally come [...] into being'. There is an 'empirical declaration that the name of this dog "was" Kate' (Ackerley 2005, 31).

For Ackerley, *Watt's* longest variant passage amounts to an 'outrageous parody of scholasticism in an impossible treatise' (Ackerley 2005, 31). The idealist prioritisation of logical consistency over empirical fact – the food has disappeared so 'something must have wrought the change' – is certainly a part of Beckett's send-up in this passage (Ackerley 2005, 31). This is secondary, however, to the insistence that 'nothing can be added' to the Knott establishment and 'nothing taken away', that supply and demand must cancel each other out without leftover or remainder. Equilibrium is the idealist premise that impels Beckett's parody to discover the colony of dogs, the Lynch family and, in the typescript, the dog orgy. The categorical 'necessity' is not the necessity of accounting for the disappearance of the food overnight, since that necessity follows from the necessity of maintaining equilibrium "in" (though in reality now outside of) Knott's establishment. The way that the hypothetical drifts into the categorical is telling. It is the same philosophical trick that formalist economists use to assert the

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<sup>46</sup> Kant, *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Thomas Kingsmill Abbott (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 2005), p. 31

validity of their models over the economic reality they are nominally describing.

Formalism is closely related to Marginalism, which I discussed in the previous chapter. It is also therefore related to the contemporary incarnations of Marginalism: microeconomics (how individuals and “firms” make decisions) and neoclassicism (the behaviour of markets based on that model). All three are characterised by the mathematical analysis of “utility maximisation” in conditions of scarcity.<sup>47</sup> Once they have posited economic equilibrium as a formal goal or possibility – that is, as a closed system in which supply and demand tend towards convergence – premises will be found which aver that position. In the tradition of Léon Walras’s “general equilibrium theory”, also discussed in the previous chapter, it is believed that every transaction that occurs, and the prices that the commodities will have been worth, is a moment of equilibrium that demonstrates the tendency of the system as a whole. ‘Essentially’, Ben Fine and Dimitri Milonakis summarise, ‘general equilibrium theory sought to establish the existence of equilibrium prices and quantities across all markets simultaneously’.<sup>48</sup> But what is happening here, as Stuart Plattner notes, is that the premises of the claim that the economy is a closed system are being deduced from the “necessity”, as Kant might put it, that they themselves are supporting. ‘This post hoc reasoning back to a priori assumptions has minimal scientific value as it is not readily subject to falsification’, Plattner succinctly concludes.<sup>49</sup> It is a circular argument, equilibrium is equilibrium is equilibrium, used exclusively by bourgeois economists to legitimise unfettered *laissez faire* exchange for the benefit of those with existing economic power. If it is the case, they argue backwards, that the capitalist economy tends towards equilibrium, then surely it ought to be allowed to do so unmolested by social interferences like progressive taxation and the welfare state. As Sebastian Berger puts

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<sup>47</sup> Karl Polanyi, who invented the term “formalism” 1944, emphasises its attention to ‘the means-end’ relationship, which also aligns it with Kant’s hypothetical and categorical imperatives. Polanyi, *The Livelihood of Man*, ed. Harry W. Pearson (New York: The Academic Press, 1977), p. 20.

<sup>48</sup> Ben Fine and Dimitri Milonakis, *From Political Economy to Economics: Method, the Social and the Historical in the Evolution of Economic Theory* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 280.

<sup>49</sup> Stuart Plattner, *Economic Anthropology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), p. 212.

it, [o]ne of the main principles of neoclassical analysis is its assumption that there is a stationary state [i.e. equilibrium] towards which the economy is headed. [...] As a result, [neoclassical economists] tend to oppose government interference in market economies'.<sup>50</sup> This is about efficiency, the argument goes, and increased efficiency benefits society as a whole; the Panglossian metaphors being “wealth trickles down” and “a rising tide lifts all boats”. *Watt* and its typescript comprehensively debunk the logic of this ideology. When equilibrium is asserted a priori as a systemic tendency, i.e. when a closed system is posited as a fact that precedes any empirical evidence for it, the result is unstoppable growth, a manifestly open system, since every attempt to reach a balance of inputs and outputs must fail due to unmodellable random variables like appetite (Mr Knott) and unfortunate material exigencies like the limits of biological endurance in conditions of scarcity (the dogs and the Lynches). This kind of “growth” naturally ensures that the needs of metaphysically eccentric landlords like Knott are met exactly, and that they are able to benefit from the 100% efficiency of their establishment while a miserable local economy staggers on under the burden of that requirement. If Knott were a capitalist, he would be making money from the enforced necessity that ‘nothing can be added’ to his household and ‘nothing taken away’. The unachievable equilibrium of supply and demand coinciding, the capitalist sublime of immaculate efficiency, requires an infinity elsewhere to counterbalance it. In the world we live in that is the infinity of accumulation. In the published *Watt* we only see its corollary: the ‘accumulation of misery, torment of labour, slavery, ignorance, brutalisation and moral degradation at the opposite pole’, the Lynches who gruesomely propagate themselves in order to make the hypothesis of equilibrium a “necessary” one (Marx 1990, 799) But in the typescript even their suffering is subjected to the principle of equilibrium, as they are afforded a grim sort of compensation at the ‘opposite pole’ of mass sexual euphoria, however fleeting. Their parodied jouissance at the dog orgy,

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<sup>50</sup> Sebastian Berger, *The Foundations of Non-Equilibrium Economics: The Principle of Circular and Cumulative Causation* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 77.



where Knott's infinite remainder is eventually burned up (on even days), is finally counterbalanced by Beckett's own masochistically laborious exertion in composing this section, as if the principle of equilibrium were categorically necessary rather than merely 'hypothetical'. Beckett himself is finally a victim of Knott's requirement that his household be a closed system, since Beckett is the one who has to do the apparently joyless work of constructing an economic model in which that requirement might be (almost) true. But it is the reader who is the eventual repository of the remainder of Mr Knott's dinner, since it is they who are eventually obliged to compensate for the text's imbalances with a reading of it, much as Watt is obliged to compensate for the discomfiting excess of non-linguistic reality over language with his helpless words, his "pottery", an anagram of poetry with one letter fittingly leftover ("[]looking at a pot, [...] or thinking of a pot, [...] it was in vain that Watt said, Pot, pot' (Wa, 67)). The text's ever faltering equilibrium gives way to accumulation outside of it, literal economic growth in the form of a 'buoyant' critical industry.<sup>51</sup> Beckett Studies is the Lynch family in this economy, deduced into existence by a felt imperative to balance the books, grimly reproducing itself with interpretation after interpretation to counteract the texts's unmodellable uncertainties and remainders. Interpretive labour becomes the 'abscess' on the 'cavity' of Beckett's writing, an accumulation of 'pus & pain' in the doomed attempt to close off a semantic 'economy' which is calculated to entice, and refuse, the craving for equilibrium.

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<sup>51</sup> Mary Bryden, 'Beckett's Reception in Great Britain', in Matthew Feldman and Mark Nixon (eds.), *The International Reception of Samuel Beckett* (London: Continuum, 2009), p. 45.

### **3. Hating Beckett / The Unexchangeable.**

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*Sometimes you would think I was writing for the public.*

- Samuel Beckett, *Malone Dies* (1951).<sup>1</sup>

*So it is by taking flight into the ego that love escapes abolition.*

- Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1917).<sup>2</sup>

In the first half of chapter 2, I provided an account of a long section omitted from the *Watt* (1953) [1945] manuscript. In this set-piece, the risk associated with the random variable of Mr Knott's appetite undergoes several transformations before becoming, at last, a solitary female Irish setter, left out of an orgy in which all of the other participants, canine and human, are paired-off according to their preferences. The attempt to guarantee equilibrium of inputs and outputs in the Knott household, to close the system and be able to truthfully assert that 'nothing could be added' and 'nothing taken away' from it, is just one sexually frustrated dog away from being a successful coup.<sup>3</sup> The unpredictable variable of Mr Knott's appetite, transformed into the unknowable quantity of leftover dinner, finally becomes a four-legged female dog with impetus and agency enough to decide whether or not to accept her position on the outside of the orgy-system in which all else is harmoniously balanced. Having gone to so much bother to rig up an economy to ensure no leftovers could in any circumstances remain, involving several hundred people and at least 21 dogs, Beckett has reached the

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Malone Dies*, in *Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies and The Unnamable* (London: Grove Press, 2009), p. 168.

<sup>2</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', trans. Shaun Whiteside, in Maud Ellmann and Adam Phillips (eds.), *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia* (London: Penguin Classics, 2005), p. 203. Whiteside's recent translation has been preferred to James Strachey's on this one occasion, for the reason that it puts more emphasis on Freud's economic vocabulary.

<sup>3</sup> Beckett, *Watt*, ed. C. J. Ackrley (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 2009), p. 111.

point at which no further imperfect cancellations of the remainder are possible. 8,300 words into the passage, he was no longer able to shift creative-responsibility onto the necessity of maintaining equilibrium. The remainder managed to get this far, but could go no further. The solitary Irish female setter was its final form.

This chapter tries to account for the drastic change in creative method that Beckett's writing undergoes during his most productive period, the so-called 'siege in the room'.<sup>4</sup> Having depended on heteronomous principles like equilibrium to keep going in his previous text, it will ask what it means that Beckett found the aesthetic 'spontane[ity]' he had been 'in mourning for', and at a time when he increasingly despaired of ever 'getting known'.<sup>5</sup> It will also ask what it was that the Beckett of the siege in the room was able to mobilise that the Beckett of *Watt* and, in a different way, *Murphy* (1938), could not. The "mature" work, it will suggest, is differentiated by a strange and singular distance between text and audience; and the chapter will try to account for that distance and the difficulties it presents for reading and interpretation. For Beckett, forty years old and still largely an unknown figure, the reader-object he was addressing himself to, sometimes directly, did not exist, and was increasingly unlikely ever to come out of inexistence. I will conclude that this weird, virtual relationship with an object that cannot be located that, at long last, freed Beckett to write his most aggressively 'spontaneous' prose.

When Beckett described his profession as that of a 'writer' in official documents in 1940, it must have struck him as a rather comical exaggeration of the facts.<sup>6</sup> His monograph on *Proust*, published by Chatto and Windus in 1931, was his greatest success in that department, selling 1465 copies by 1936.<sup>7</sup> A respectable figure for a

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<sup>4</sup> Deidre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), p. 346.

<sup>5</sup> Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape*, in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Dramatic Works*, 3rd ed. (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 2006), p. 222.

<sup>6</sup> James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), p. 302.

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Nash and John Pilling, "The Shatton and Windup" Affair: Beckett's Dealings with the Firm of Chatto & Windus, "Wholesale, Retail and for Exportation", in Mark Nixon (ed.), *Publishing Samuel Beckett* (London: The British Library, 2011), pp. 11-22, p. 16.

scholarly book, Beckett unfortunately despised academia and quit the same year it was published. After this, Beckett's next best claim to the profession of writer was probably his literary journalism: he had written a dozen bad-tempered reviews and essays, and one panegyric to Joyce, for coterie publications such as *The Bookman* and *transition* [sic]. He also put his name to a substantial amount of translation work for Nancy Cunard in 1934, and again for Peggy Guggenheim in 1938, but mainly for pecuniary and social reasons rather than aesthetic ones. Sean Lawlor notes that '[i]t is fairly clear he did not care much for the *NEGRO* essays he had translated', and Alan Warren Friedman quotes Henry Crowder stating that Cunard had given Beckett 'quite a large sum of money'. Beckett translated 18 essays and 1 poem – more than 63,000 words in total – for Nancy Cunard's *Negro: An Anthology* (1934). He also translated the 'Preface' for Cunard's exhibition of designs from Jean Cocteau's 1937 play, *Les Chevaliers de le Table Ronde*.<sup>8</sup>

In terms of poetry and fiction, his achievements were even less to write home about – and May Beckett was ever solicitous for news about her son's prospects, as we saw in the first chapter (e.g. Knowlson 1996, 215). There had been one longish, prize-winning poem, 'Whoroscope', in 1930 and a collection, *Echo's Bones and Other Precipitates*, in 1935, neither of which made much of an impression outside Beckett's circle of acquaintances.<sup>9</sup> His book of short stories, *More Pricks than Kicks*, cannibalised from *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, was given an airing by Chatto and Windus in 1934, selling 358 copies in a tentative print-run of 1500; John Pilling points out that *Proust* sold more copies in a week than *Pricks* did in total (Nash and Pilling 2000, 20; Pilling

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<sup>8</sup> Sean Lawlor, "'That's how it was and them were the days': Samuel Beckett's early publications with Samuel Putnam and Nancy Cunard, in Nixon, *Publishing Samuel Beckett*, pp. 23-34, p. 30. Warren Friedman, *Beckett in Black and Red: The Translations for Nancy Cunard's Negro* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2014), p. xi.

<sup>9</sup> The Europa Press, under the editorship of Beckett's first literary agent, George Reavey, only published 327 copies of *Echo's Bones*. Beckett was displeased about the small print-run and about Reavey's lacklustre promotion of his book. Nixon, 'George Reavey – Beckett's first literary agent', in Nixon (ed.), *Publishing Samuel Beckett*, pp. 41-55, p. 43, p. 45.

2006, 30). Beckett's difficulties in finding both a publisher and a readership for *Murphy* were discussed in the first chapter.

Almost exactly 3 years after the publication of *Murphy*, during which Beckett's total output as a writer consisted of 10 unpublished poems, one short story, and the translation of *Murphy* into French, Beckett started what would become his next novel, *Watt*.<sup>10</sup> This was compiled from six notebooks of bizarre vignettes and mock-demented ratiocinations, written as 'an exercise', mainly while in the little southern village of Roussillon, where Beckett and his partner Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil were in hiding from the Gestapo after their Resistance cell in Paris was betrayed by a mercenary Catholic vicar with Nazi sympathies (Knowlson 1996, 311).<sup>11</sup> When they returned to Paris three years later, Beckett arranged this material into a kind of narrative and sent it out to publishers, including Routledge, in the spring of 1945, where it was rejected as 'too wild and unintelligible' (Knowlson 1996, 310). Harold Raymond, the editor at Routledge who had been cajoled to publish *Murphy* by Jack Yeats, added this encouraging note by hand in the margin of the reader report: 'If S.B. had been going to get there he would have got nearer there by now... Let's down this' (Knowlson 1996, 311). Raymond's was not an unreasonable assumption.

Beckett, now in his early 40s and barely surviving off maternal handouts and Suzanne's dressmaking in post-war Paris, managed to stomach his neglect enough to carry on writing, and to write more intensively than at any other point in his life (Knowlson 1996, 355). Between February 1946 and January 1950 when he finished *L'Innomable* (1953), Beckett produced four novellas, four novels and two plays, as well as a critical screed with George Duthuit. How was Beckett able to persevere so far into

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<sup>10</sup> The first *Watt* notebook is dated 11/2/41. While it is true that there are two poems published after *Murphy*, 'Ooftish' and probably 'Dieppe', and one review, 'Denis Devlin', these were almost certainly written in 1937 (Pilling 2006, 74, 78).

<sup>11</sup> Beckett's comment about *Watt* being an exercise appears in Ruby Cohn, *A Beckett Canon* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2001), p. 122.

the hopelessness of ever becoming a professional writer? What kept him going on into the vanishing possibility that an audience would eventually, unlike Godot, show up?

The glamorous answer would be that he felt he was ‘essentially’ a writer, like *Murphy’s* Vera is ‘essentially a waitress’.<sup>12</sup> There is a familiar cultural narrative about the tortured artist unrecognised in his lifetime, writing for fame in ‘the execrable generations to come’, as Malone personally addresses us.<sup>13</sup> Beckett was not one of these artists. When Suzanne handed over the manuscript of *Molloy* to Georges Lambrich at Les Éditions de Minuit in October 1950 – Beckett could no longer tolerate the experience of doing this himself – he had decided this was his last shot. ‘It would have taken only this last little no thank you for me finally to see that that was it’, Beckett remembered for a radio broadcast in June 1962.<sup>14</sup> He was not a recreational scribbler, and he was certainly not a writer for whom the lack of an audience could be a source of obstinate strength, romantically proving his misunderstood genius. He openly ridicules the idea of waiting for success in the manuscript of *Watt*, where ‘Johnny Watt’ imagines his novel, *A Good Clean Man*, becoming ‘Book of the Week’ in the year 2080:

“In a word” said A. [sic] “you plan a work in form, with a beginning, a middle and an end, stiff boards and a cover to keep off the dust, one hundred thousand New Oxford Vocabes, seven and six and 10% on the first thousnad.” [sic]

“Fifteen” we said. [sic]

“And a title.”

“All our friends tell us” we replied, “that a title is indispensable if the book is to be book of the week.”

“You burst yourself to raise a laugh” said A. [sic] “and when you don’t succeed you don’t greatly mind. Bully for you.”

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<sup>12</sup> Beckett, *Murphy*, ed. J. C. C. Mays (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), p. 54.

<sup>13</sup> Beckett, *Malone Dies*, in *Three Novels*, p. 174.

<sup>14</sup> The script for this broadcast is quoted in the third volume of Beckett’s letters. Beckett, *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Vol. 3, 1957-1965*, eds. George Craig, Martha Dow Fehsenfeld, Dan Gunn and Lois More Overbeck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. xvii.

“The laugh will be raised about 2080” we replied<sup>15</sup>

Omitted from the manuscript Beckett eventually delivered to publishers, this passage is at once a typically sardonic account of the subordination of imaginative labour to commercial arrangements, and a consoling simplification of the arduous work of writing to those merely practical considerations. So far, so *Murphy*. Like *Murphy*, it is also about a writer who is frustrated with the reception of their work, though the blame has shifted from the author to the audience; Beckett thought *Murphy* a ‘poor’ book, where Johnny Watt is confident that his work will be uncovered in 150 years and modestly celebrated. That is the joke, on the face of it: it is quixotically entrepreneurial to haggle on the basis of a book that does not exist yet (‘you plan a work’), let alone been accepted by publishers; and the juxtaposition of phoney commercial nous and the Romantic narrative of predestined eventual fame is bathetic. Marketability and immortality have been set alongside each other, and neither benefit from the comparison: marketability looks even more cynical next to the splendour of everlasting “autonomous” art, and Romantic fame looks like a consoling sublimation of material interests. Johnny Watt has wishfully confused aesthetic and economic success, with the result that he will get neither. He will be long dead by the time he receives the fictionally negotiated share of the non-existent profits of the book he has not written, a punchline that multiplies non-being by non-being three times, like Bertrand Russell’s positivist joke about the King of France being bald, but to the power of four.<sup>16</sup> This longing for a counterfactual future suggests the context in which *Watt* was written. Begun in Paris on the 11<sup>th</sup> of February 1941, some nine months after the Fall of France, Beckett wrote the bulk of *Watt*’s six notebooks while ‘on the run’ and ‘of an evening after the clod-hopping’, work in the potato and grain fields, from November 1942 to

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<sup>15</sup> Beckett, *Watt* [1945], Ts. Series I, Box 6 Folder 5, Samuel Beckett Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, pp. 107-8.

<sup>16</sup> Bertrand Russell, ‘On Denoting’, in *Essays in Analysis*, ed. D. Lackey (New York George Braziller: 1973), p. 107-9.

August 1944 in Roussillon.<sup>17</sup> Unsure of any future, let alone a future of homely philistine institutions like the 'Book of the Week', Beckett has made a joke that conforms to Arsene's category of 'mirthless' humour (*Wa*, 41). It produces a 'laugh that laughs [...] at that which is unhappy', certainly, but it is also a 'laugh laughing at the laugh', a trickier involution (*Wa*, 41). If this manuscript was uncovered and modestly celebrated in 2080, it would have been not funny for 137 years, and that would be the joke. The laugh that would be raised would be laughing at that laugh, because there was no other laugh to precede it. This joke was never published, because if it had been, it would not have worked. It is a joke, quite literally, for no one. Beckett's own circumstances have dovetailed with history. His increasing hopelessness of ever finding an audience is amplified by the possibility that there might never be an audience to find, or only an audience of fascists. He is laughing at his failure and at the Romantic excuses that will no longer work for failure, since there may not be a future in which art can be discovered and cherished.

If Beckett could not be a writer aiming for glory in 150 years' time, what was he? He was a professional writer, in the sense that he wrote and he was in dire need of a profession. But he was also, palpably, a writer in search of a reader; a writer for whom the process of missing a reader may have been vitally important, but vitally important in the present. Writing would only continue to be possible for him if he did not altogether lose hope of finding an audience, if he could believe in an audience who was not unconditionally lost to him. That must have been a reader who, without having yet existed, was not dead either. The next, theoretical tranche of the chapter will suggest that the period 1946-1950 was the most productive of Beckett's career, not in spite of the fact that it seemed to him ever more unlikely that this reader would come out of inexistence for him, but because of it. 'Sometimes you would think I was writing for the public', jokes Malone (*Ma*, 163). It was not until the spring of 1951, when *Molloy* was

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<sup>17</sup> Beckett, Letter to George Reavery, qtd. in Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*, pp. 386-7.



reviewed enthusiastically by a number of prominent French commentators, including Georges Bataille and Maurice Nadeau, that he could really be said to be doing so. Everything written up to this point, including *Waiting for Godot* (1953) [1948], was composed as Beckett steadily lost hope of ever finding an audience. Before the war, Beckett had been ‘in mourning’ for aesthetic spontaneity. After it, his aesthetic spontaneity was derived from an objectless kind of mourning.

Sigmund Freud’s essay ‘Mourning and Melancholia’ (1917) describes two responses to the experience of loss. Primarily, this will have been the loss of a love object, but it may also be ‘a reaction to the loss of [...] an abstraction taking the place of the person, such as fatherland, freedom, and ideal and so on’ (Freud 2005, 203). Mourning is the way in which the healthy psychoanalytic subject reconciles himself to an empirical world in which that object or abstraction is missing (Freud 2005, 204).<sup>18</sup> This involves a recognition that his inner world, in which the lost one continues to exist as a subjective or ‘unconscious object’, cannot be made to tally with the evidence of his senses (Freud 2005, 215). The object does not go on existing in the world that we agree on, on which our own existence, the narcissism binding us to life, depends:

Reality delivers its verdict that the object no longer exists, and the ego, presented with the question, so to speak, of whether it wishes to share this fate, is persuaded by the sum of narcissistic satisfactions that it derives from being alive to loosen its bonds with the object that has been destroyed. (Freud 2005, 215)

Freud is describing a form of ambivalence. It is like the ‘ambivalence of love relationships’ in childhood, but more extreme, because the libido has to detach itself completely from the object, rather than just enough to become an individuated being. In mourning, ‘love and hatred struggle with one another, one to free the libido from the object, the other to maintain the existing libido position against the onslaught’ (Freud

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<sup>18</sup> Freud’s use of the male pronoun has been followed throughout, chiefly for the sake of grammatical consistency, but also because it seems to take on a squeamish pathos in connection with Beckett.

2005, 210-11).<sup>19</sup> Freud confesses that he does not know how this process occurs ‘in economic terms’ (Freud 2005, 205). How is the psyche able to afford the ‘great expenditure of time and investment of energy’ needed to loosen the ‘thousands of connections’ that exist with the object that has been lost (Freud 2005, 215-6)? The last thing that a mourning individual wants to do is relax their attachments to the lost person, due to the value placed by the ego on objects that are unavailable to it (Freud 2005, 205). ‘Each individual memory and expectation in which the libido was connected to the object is adjusted and hyper-invested’, creating an ‘accumulation of investment’ so vast that Freud admits, again, he cannot ‘identify the economic means through which mourning accomplishes [the] task’ of amortising it (Freud 2005, 205, 217, 215). ‘[P]eople are reluctant to abandon a libido position’ at the best of times, ‘even if a substitute is beckoning’ (Freud 2005, 205). Yet somehow this is achieved in mourning, and ‘the ego is left free and uninhibited’ to relocate its desire in the world, however economically improbable that might be (Freud 2005, 205).<sup>20</sup>

Melancholia is nearly the opposite of mourning in this regard. Melancholia looks like mourning, because it often involves ‘the loss of a beloved object’, whether that is a ‘person’ or ‘abstraction’ (Freud 2005, 205). The difference, to begin with, is that the melancholic person may not be able to ‘grasp what he has lost’, even when he can identify the person or thing that is not there (Freud 2005, 205). This leads to a ‘similar kind of internal work’ to that of mourning, with the great expenditure of time and

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<sup>19</sup> Ambivalence is something that Freud strategically and confusingly avoids mentioning until it is time to compare its role in mourning with its more emphatic role in melancholia. It is unclear why he does this, besides rhetorically, since it is made plain that the push and pull of ‘normal mourning’ is a struggle of ambivalence (Freud 2005, 210). As we will see, the difference between ambivalence in mourning and ambivalence in melancholia is, Freud says, that the latter involves ‘a series’ of such struggles, because there are countless possible objects (Freud 2005, 216).

<sup>21</sup> This description of an identification with an abandoned object is an unremarked echo of the formation of the faculty of ‘guilt’ in *Totem and Taboo* (1913). The structure is identical: the loss of a loved one followed by ‘identif[ication]’ with them as a fearsome source of self-reproach. The difference is in the quality of the reproach, which Freud regards as socially useful in one case and pathological in the other. The sons in *Totem and Taboo* also murder and consume their father, and this is presumably why their ‘remorse’ is considered to be proportionate and “non-neurotic”. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, in James Strachey (ed.), *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 13* (London: Vintage, 2001), p. 143.

investment of energy needed to loosen the thousands of connections to the lost object (Freud 2005, 205). However, 'the result is not the normal one of the withdrawal of the libido from this object and its displacement on to a new one', but a withdrawal into the melancholic's ego itself, where it 'produce[s] an *identification* [...] with the abandoned object' (Freud 2005, 2009).<sup>21</sup> The nature of this narcissistic identification is, Freud says, 'sadistic' towards the ego, because it carries with it the aggression felt towards the 'unknown loss' (Freud 2005, 211, 2005):

If the love of the object, which cannot be abandoned while the object itself is abandoned, has fled into narcissistic identification, hatred goes to work on this substitute object [i.e. the ego], insulting it, humiliating it, making it suffer and deriving a sadistic satisfaction from that suffering. (Freud 2005, 217)

Narcissistic identification is the ego's last-ditch attempt to prevent the 'love relationship' from being 'abandoned', but it comes at a cost (Freud 2005, 210). The melancholic redirects the aggression felt towards the 'loss' into himself, because he cannot 'express' the 'hostility' that he feels towards it 'directly' for not being available (Freud 2005, 212). This 'critical agency' is installed in the ego, where it produces the intense feelings of self-criticism that we associate with clinical depression (Freud 2005, 216):

The patient describes his ego to us as worthless, incapable of functioning and morally reprehensible; he is filled with self-reproach, he levels insults against himself and expects ostracism and punishment. He abases himself before everyone else, he feels sorry for those close to him for being connected to such an unworthy person. (Freud 2005, 206)

'Thus', Freud provisionally concludes, 'the loss of object has been transformed into a loss of ego', and the 'conflict' that cannot continue between 'the beloved person' and the 'ego' is transformed into a 'dichotomy between ego-criticism and the ego as modified by

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identification', a punitive ego-subject and a punished ego-object (Freud 2005, 209).

Loss in the world has become loss of self-esteem, as a way of clinging on to a love object that is not there. Rather than relocate the libido attached to that object, the ego decides not to find its love anywhere in the world. Melancholia now, contradictorily, appears to be the opposite of mourning, the ability to accept 'substitute' objects (Freud 2005, 205). It is love 'taking flight into the ego' to escape 'abolition', the refusal to 'give up' a particular love object for others (Freud 2005, 203, 217).

Freud is evasive about the specific kind of objects and circumstances that occasion melancholia. He starts by asserting that it does not even need to involve a person, then goes on to exclusively describe love relationships with persons (Freud 2005, 203). He imagines three circumstances involving living people, but also says that melancholia is 'a reaction to the loss of a beloved object' through death in 'a large number of cases' (Freud 2005, 205). The loss of an object through 'slight[s] and disappointment[s]' sounds like a relationship that the other party has ended, while references to 'abandoned' and 'forsaken' objects suggests the reverse (Freud 2005, 209). The picture of a melancholic 'tormenting their loved one through his illness' indicates an ongoing troubled relationship, as does another vignette about a 'woman who loudly pities her husband for being tied to such an incapable wife' (Freud 2005, 211, 208). However, as we have seen, the most frequent formulation is 'the loss of an object' or 'love object' or 'beloved object', without further qualification (Freud 2005, e.g. 211, 210, 209). These are also, perhaps not coincidentally, the phrases that are used to describe the objects of mourning as well as melancholia.

This leaves Freud wondering how to differentiate them causally. Could Otto Rank be right to argue that the only difference between them is that melancholia is characterised by a narcissistic object choice, while mourning is not? Rank's conclusion would bring about the required regression to narcissism for the simple reason that narcissistic dispositions will make narcissistic object choices, so they are closer to it to

begin with and more prone to regression (Freud 2005, 209). But this does not work either, because it does not account for the increase in ambivalence that, Freud says, prevents melancholia from detaching from its object, distinguishing it from normal mourning (Freud 2005, 211). This is where Freud seems to find a solution. Ambivalence in melancholia is more ‘complicated’ than in ‘normal mourning’, because ‘melancholia involves a *series* of individual battles for the object’, rather than just one.<sup>22</sup> There is more than one object because melancholia ‘proceeds precisely from those experiences that involve the threat of losing the object’, whatever it might now be, and from there to ‘every love relationship formed by this particular ego’ (Freud 2005, 216). Melancholia is like mourning that cannot happen, ‘perhaps because of the large number of causes or because of the fact they are working together’, an exponential multiplication of losses (Freud 2005, 216). Its object will be caught up in ‘countless separate struggles’ of ambivalence, in which it is hated emblematically, for everything that does not exist but can’t be given up (Freud 2005, 216).

Freud had believed that melancholia was triggered by a single lost object and spread out from there, but now he is suggesting that innumerable real and potential losses come together in a substitute object that is not mourned but attacked in phantasy. ‘Just as mourning impels the ego to renounce the object by declaring its death’, Freud concludes, ‘so does each single struggle of ambivalence loosen the fixation of the libido to the object by devaluing, disparaging and, so to speak, even killing it’ (Freud 2005, 217). When the object is successfully ‘abandoned as worthless’, the melancholia will be ‘[brought] to an end’ (Freud 2005, 217). The object will have sacrificially taken the

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<sup>22</sup> A peculiarity emerges at this point of the essay. Freud writes that ‘melancholia [...] contains more than normal mourning’, indicating that melancholia is a subcategory of mourning (Freud 2005, 216). How does a category contain less than the subcategories within it? Perhaps by being based on a (very Beckettian) logic of absence. If ‘the total object is complete with missing parts’, then its subsidiary objects could conceivably contain more than the object itself. Beckett, ‘Three Dialogues with George Duthuit’, in *Proust and Three Dialogues with George Duthuit* (London: John Calder Publishers, 1999), p. 101.

place of the worthless ego, which ‘enjoy[s] the satisfaction of acknowledging itself to be the better of the two, the superior object’ (Freud 2005, 217).

There have been several accounts of Beckett’s work in relation to Freud’s conception of mourning. In a reading that neglects the conspicuous detail that they are barely characters, let alone people, John Keller sees Arsene and Watt struggling with the difficulty of mourning Knott as an absence. This plug-and-play, exemplifying approach to Beckett ironically makes the texts go dead, something the chapter performs and assesses later on. Keller is much more compelling when he is characterising the spirit of the work, but the argument short-circuits whenever a textual detail is mentioned. Broadly speaking, Keller thinks that Beckett’s insistence on hatred and loss belies the ‘primacy’ of the erotic rather than the destructive impulses, making him a Freudian rather than a Kleinian.<sup>23</sup> Phil Baker avoids diagnostic literalism by arguing that psychoanalysis is a take-it-or-leave-it ‘mythology’ for Beckett, a useful source of material that Beckett incorporates without necessarily suggesting that it has explanatory power. Baker’s argument allows him to claim that much of Beckett’s work has ‘deep investments’ in the ‘whole retrospective landscape of loss’ that characterises ‘mid-twentieth century culture’, of which Freud’s ‘mourning and melancholia’ is a part.<sup>24</sup> Jonathan Boulter asks whether ‘mourning require[s] a subject’, and argues that Beckett’s *Texts for Nothing* (1955) show that it does not.<sup>25</sup> Beckett’s ‘aporetic mourning’ involves a ‘narrating subject without subjectivity’, where subjectivity means an identification with ‘personal history’ and perhaps the past as such (Boulter 2004, 337). Without a personal history, the narrator of the *Texts* ‘speaks into being its own agonised condition of speaking itself into being’, unable to ‘locate’ itself ‘in time and space’ (Boulter 2004, 344). Boulter concludes that ‘the Beckettian subject’ is mourning

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<sup>23</sup> John Keller, *Samuel Beckett and the Primacy of Love* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 108-9.

<sup>24</sup> Phil Baker, *Beckett and the Mythology of Psychoanalysis* (London: Macmillan, 1997), p. xv.

<sup>25</sup> Jonathan Boulter, ‘Does Mourning Require a Subject? Samuel Beckett’s *Texts for Nothing*’, *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 2 (2004), p. 331.

‘the inability to end’, which means ‘the inability to move past its own voice’ (Boulter 2004, 337). Without a past to put things in, the voice cannot ‘move past trauma’, meaning that trauma is an ‘intractable presence’ (Boulter 2004, 344). This is not convincing. Trauma, we have been told, is ‘a reaction to an event or events’ (Boulter 2004, 335). It might involve ‘a disrupt[ion] of the linearity of experience’, but it does not involve the abolition of it (Boulter 2004, 336). Where would the trauma be located as an event, for a subject without a personal history, let alone ‘a subject who cannot maintain with any certainty that the experiences he describes are in fact his own’? (Boulter 2004, 337) An argument could be made that subjectivity ‘requires’ a foundational loss (not a trauma), and that the ‘Beckettian subject’ is in some sense “mourning” the absence of this loss; but this is not what Boulter is arguing. What’s more, trauma is elided with mourning, and mourning is elided with melancholia, so that none of these terms bear any relation to their initial source in Freud. Freud’s account is slippery, but it is not this slippery. Mourning is not ‘the means by which the subject is able to move past trauma’ (Boulton 2004, 344); it is the means by which the subject is able to detach their libido from a definite object. And if the *Texts* ‘articulate mourning in the expression of its impossibility’, they are not articulating mourning, which is possible by definition; melancholia is Freud’s term for “impossible” mourning (Boulter 2004, 344). Boulter’s conclusions are at least suggestive. Mourning ‘the inability to end’ means mourning the inability to make the present become past. If the present won’t die or stay dead, what has really been lost is the future. Melancholia, on this reading, is like mourning forwards. It is, to invert Boulter’s phrase, mourning without an object.

There are far fewer accounts of Beckett in relation to melancholia, possibly because a pathologisation of unhappiness would make Beckett’s commitment to the undying badness of things look like a merely ‘local phenomenon’, as Malone might say (*Ma*, 228). Graley Herren has argued that ‘*Eh Joe* (1965) amounts to a case study in chronic melancholia’, where this means that Joe ‘takes his sadistic impulses towards objects

(father, mother, lovers) and redirects them inwards just as Freud describes'.<sup>26</sup> Herren's account stops at the first inversion of hatred in Freud's essay, leaving it pointed inwards. Herren's limited interpretation raises the question of why Joe is 'throttling the dead in his head' rather than attacking his own ego, as this stage of Freud's argument suggests he should be (Herren 2013, 198). The element of hatred in melancholia is more complicated than this, as we will see.

Daniel Birnbaum and Anders Olsson argue that Beckett's post-war writing is characterised by mania rather than melancholia, because of the 'relentless, repetitive voice' that has no 'access to itself'.<sup>27</sup> Birnbaum and Olsson Beckett's purported mania to the hatred that the work displays towards maternal figures, because both are an externalisation of melancholic self-hatred; 'everything that had belonged to an inner space of the psyche is belched out' (Birnbaum and Olsson 2009, 79). In Freud's account, mania occurs when an 'accumulation of investment' is 'freed once the work of melancholia is concluded' (Freud 2005, 217). The melancholic's innumerable struggles with ambivalence have taken up a vast amount of cathectic energy, and now he 'demonstrates his liberation from the object by pouncing on his new object-investments like a ravenous man' (Freud 2005, 214). Mania is, in other words, characterised by an unsustainable absence of ambivalence, i.e. the element of hatred in object-investments. Birnbaum and Olsson's conception of mania as 'a turning of melancholy towards the outside', rather than a turning outward of the energy that had been taken up by it, means that he can include hatred as a component of mania (Birnbaum and Olsson 2009, 80). Freud, however, goes on to argue that the hatred of an object was the *sine qua non* of melancholia all along, since 'each single struggle of ambivalence loosens the fixation of the libido to the object by devaluing, disparaging and, so to speak, even

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<sup>26</sup> Graley Herren, "'The Best's to come": Suicidal Fantasy in *Eh Joe*, in Anthony Uhlmann (ed.), *Samuel Beckett's Plays on Film and Television* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 197.

<sup>27</sup> Daniel Birnbaum and Anders Olsson, *As a Weasel Sucks Eggs: An Essay on Melancholy Cannibalism*, trans. Brian Manning Delaney (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2009), p. 77.



killing it' (Freud 2005, 217). The chapter concludes with a return to this final inversion of destructive energy.

Beckett's writing in the post-war period seems to follow a similar logic of value to the one that Freud expounds in his account of melancholia. It is by turns fawning and furious with a reader-object that does not exist, and was less likely than ever to come out of inexistence. It is caught up in a struggle of ambivalence with this absent audience-object, from which it cannot free itself because it does not exist and cannot be located as a loss in the past. It is looking for a substitute object to begin the work of melancholia, because the absent object produces unmanageable ambivalence, being loved the more it is hated and hated the more it is loved. This dynamic is played out in the narrators's relations with the world. The opening of 'The Expelled' (1973) [1946], the second of the Four Novellas, has an instructive parody of the melancholic's readiness to 'abase himself and expect [...] ostracism and punishment', as well as 'feel[ing] sorry for those' around him (Freud 2005, 206).<sup>28</sup> The narrator is grateful to his charitable persecutors for hurling him down a thoughtfully limited number of steps as they eject him from the premises, and for not, on this occasion, beating him remorselessly with a stick, for the enjoyment and 'edification' of 'persons assembled in the vestibule'.<sup>29</sup> 'They were most correct', he adds, imitating the class of his persecutors (*TE*, 46). The narrator's exaggerated deference and gratitude to figures of authority, even when they are openly abusing him, constitutes a sympathetic identification with the feelings of disgust or hilarity that his person "ought" to produce in the general population ('[m]y appearance still made people laugh, with that hearty jovial laugh so good for the health' (*TE*, 81)). That abstract "ought" is more palpable in 'The End'

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<sup>28</sup> According to both Knowlson and Pilling, Gontarski has the order wrong, putting 'The Expelled' before 'The End' (Knowlson 1996, 362). John Pilling, *Samuel Beckett: A Chronology* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 99.

<sup>29</sup> Beckett, 'The Expelled', in S. E. Gontarski (ed.), *The Complete Short Prose of Samuel Beckett, 1929–1989* (New York: Grove Press, 1995), p. 46.

(1973) [1946], the first of the Novellas, which gives more focus to social norms and economic requirements:

They clothed me and gave me money. I knew what the money was for, it was to get me started. When it was gone I would have to get more, if I wanted to go on.<sup>30</sup>

The narrator is materially dependent on an anonymous '[t]hey', who are representatives of an inscrutable, indifferently sadistic authority. The institutional setting, filtered through the cataractic impressions of the narrator, would be like Kafka if the lagomorphic narrator of 'The Burrow' (1933) felt at home in Josef K's unfathomable bureaucratic hell, and greeted the news of his unexplained eviction with an affectedly aristocratic chagrin. His defensive pride at mastering one of the basics of social existence, money, is the obverse of his defiant naivety of the rest of the catalogue. It is a kind of weaponised stupidity, a way of making visible the barely latent violence of society's tacit claims by blindly crashing into them. The magnitude of the melancholic's self-hatred is so great only the whole world can match it. The narrator has to be maximally vulnerable so that he can be the object of the whole world's social violence, concentrated to a single point.

'The Expelled' shows that hatred being projected outwards again, as the narrator tries and fails to find a substitute object to start the work of melancholia. He picks on figures whose weakness best approximates his own felt valuelessness, mirroring the eagerness with which he formed psychic alliances with punitive and abusive standpoints:

A policeman stopped me and said, The street for vehicles, the sidewalk for pedestrians. Like a bit of Old Testament. So I got back on the sidewalk, almost apologetically, and persevered there, in spite of an indescribable jostle, for a good twenty steps, till I had to fling myself to the ground to avoid crushing a child. He was wearing a little harness, I remember, with little bells, he must have taken himself for a pony, or a Clysedale, why not. I would have crushed him gladly, I loathe children, and it would have been doing him a service, but I was afraid of reprisals. Everyone is a parent, that is what keeps you from hoping. One should reserve, on busy streets, special tracks for these nasty little creatures, their prams, hoops, sweets, scooters, skates, grandpas, grandmas, nannies, balloons and balls, all their foul little

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<sup>30</sup> Beckett, 'The End', in *The Complete Short Prose*, p. 60.

happiness in a word. I fell then, and brought down with me an old lady covered with spangles and lace, who must have weighed about sixteen stone. Her screams soon drew a crowd. I had high hopes she had broken her femur, old ladies break their femur easily, but not enough, not enough. I took advantage of the confusion to make off, muttering unintelligible oaths, as if I were the victim, and I was, but I couldn't have proved it. They never lynch children, babies, no matter what they do they are whitewashed in advance. I personally would lynch them with the utmost pleasure, I don't say I'd lend a hand, no, I am not a violent man, but I'd encourage the others<sup>31</sup> and stand them drinks when it was done. (TE, 52)

The narrator has crashed into a social prohibition, in the form of a policeman, who would normally represent the social violence necessary to match the magnitude of his self-hatred. His instruction is '[l]ike a bit of Old Testament' because of the simplicity of the rule, but also because of the punitive, unanswerable deity in that text, a 'sadistic', 'critical agency' like the one that loss installs in the ego. He is only 'almost apologetic' for the transgression, which indicates his hatred is turning outwards, since he would normally attack himself unconditionally (e.g. '[t]hey were most correct'). A child appears, a figure of regression as well as weakness, to which the narrator's hatred can attach. It works, up to a point ('I loathe children'), but is checked by fear of 'reprisals', a weak justification given that he is about to advocate lynching babies. Perhaps it is an excuse for ambivalence ('their foul little happiness'): the child then shatters into an assortment of metonymic objects, lovingly-hatefully enumerated, which block the fullness of his hatred. The narrator's hatred spontaneously overflows, attacking the next object as if he were under a spell: 'I fell then' indicates causality ("therefore") as much as temporal sequence; "I then fell" would remove this ambiguity. The 'old lady', another figure of weakness, is 'sixteen stone' and overdressed, a misogynist, ageist target; the narrator's self-hatred is latching onto everyday social violence again, the only reservoir big enough to match it. Soon enough, the old lady shatters into several objects, too; broken bones at first, then into innumerable old ladies and their broken

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<sup>31</sup> '*J'encouragerais les autres*', in the French, is an echo of a famous line from Voltaire's *Candide*, '*pour encourager les autres*', which refers to the execution of the commander of the British forces, Admiral John Byng, for failing to 'do his utmost' in the Battle of Minorca. 'In this country', writes Voltaire, 'it is wise to kill an admiral from time to time to encourage the others.' The military connotation supports a historical reading. Voltaire, *Candide: A Dual-Language Book*, ed. and trans. Shane Weller (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1993), p. 122.

bones. But the narrator's hatred outstrips the supply again; 'old ladies break their femur easily, but not enough, not enough'. Insatiable, it goes looking for a new object, and finds the most vulnerable one of all. It was the child's fault that he collided with the old lady, the narrator decides, but now the child has become a baby, or all 'babies'. In the attempt to reproduce the ratio of hatred and vulnerability that melancholia demands, summoning the whole world of social violence to fulfil its self-hatred, his other-hatred has alighted on the most vulnerable object it can think of. The inversion is (almost) complete. The narrator tries to 'make off, muttering unintelligible oaths, as if [he] were the victim', which he now feels '[he] is'. He has found a substitute object to 'devalu[e], 'disparag[e] and, so to speak, even kill'; and he is 'enjoying the satisfaction of acknowledging [himself] to be the better', the most blameless, 'of the two' (Freud 2005, 217).

'They never lynch children, babies', the narrator regrets, because they are 'whitewashed in advanced'. This looks like a curiously innocuous explanation, given the violence of the passage. The text seems to be provoking us to ask disconcerting contextual questions. It is not that 'they' never kill babies; it was well-known, after all, that countless 'children' and 'babies' were murdered by the Nazis during the War. This inconsistency draws attention to the specific mode of execution. In 1946, the connotations of the word '*lynchage*' in France were overwhelmingly to do with violent recriminations against "*les collaborateurs*".<sup>32</sup> As Eric Stover points out, 'France's liberation in the Summer of 1944 led to a wave of lynchings and other acts of revenge against many former occupation officials and their Vichy collaborators'.<sup>33</sup> Primed by this cue, the narrator's enthusiastic but passive complicity in group-sadism ('stand them drinks'), contemptuously unjustified by the bromide of pacifism ('I am not a violent man'), seems to be calculated to evoke the lower ranges of Nazi collaboration,

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<sup>32</sup> Beckett, '*L'Expulsé*', *Nouvelles et Textes pour Rien* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2014), p. 11.

<sup>33</sup> Eric Stover et. al, *Hiding in Plain Sight: The Pursuit of War Criminals from Nuremberg to the War on Terror* (Oakland, Ca: University of California Press, 2016), p. 109.

too. Historical trauma is being used to unsettle the contemporaneous reader. It is not more explicit because innuendo is intrinsically more unsettling; the work involved in subtly incorporating a referent indicates premeditation, a real intent to cause distress. It also creates a slow drama of revelation that is unnervingly like being traumatised in the first place. The line about babies being ‘whitewashed in advanced’, ‘*blanchis d’avance*’, now looks even more sinisterly innocuous (*Ex*, 11). It is not about Nazi infanticide; it is about the acquittal of collaborators. ‘Those acquitted, or who could give satisfactory excuses, for their alleged collaboration, were said to be *blanchis* (whitewashed)’, writes Catherine Gavin.<sup>34</sup> Taken at his word, the narrator is implying that lynching, the fate met by many collaborators, ought to be extended to children, because like many collaborators they have been unfairly ‘whitewashed’. The text is mobilising political rage and the backlash to that political rage, intensifying them with an evocation of infanticide, to disturb every possible reader as much as possible. The narrator’s attacks have shifted, emphatically, from objects in his world to the text’s ‘unknown’ object outside of it. The text is trying to provoke its reader-object, which for it still does not exist, with every contextual weapon it can lay its hands on. It is directing its hatred right back at an object like the one that occasions it, a loss that provokes unmanageable ambivalence by being unlocatable.

‘First Love’ (1973) [1946], a revealing title in this context, is even more openly hostile to its object, animadverting to ‘cunts like you’, readers on whom it is, very precisely, ‘wasted’.<sup>35</sup> It also makes use of historical trauma to injure the reader. The story opens with the narrator ‘wander[ing], hands clasped’ behind his back through the cemetery where his father is buried, savouring the corpses like an aesthete:

The smell of corpses, distinctly perceptible under those of grass and humus mingled, I do not find unpleasant, a trifle on the sweet side perhaps, a trifle heady, but how infinitely preferable to what the living emit, their feet, teeth, armpits, arses, sticky

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<sup>34</sup> Catherine Gavin, *Liberated France* (London: St. Martin’s Press, 1955), p. 63.

<sup>35</sup> Beckett, ‘First Love’, in *The Complete Short Prose*, p. 33.

foreskins and frustrated ovules. And when my father's remains join in, however modestly, I can almost shed a tear. (*FL*, 26)

The narrator is a picture of romantic contemplation, hands behind his back in deferential receptivity to sensation, drinking down a symphony of corpses. Mourning a father, which for Beckett was a lastingly traumatic event, is the finishing touch on a subtle and marvellous aesthetic experience of mass death. A connoisseur of graveyards, the narrator confesses a special weakness for Ohlsdorf Cemetery in Hamburg, specifically 'the Linne section, on Prussian soil' (this is a faithfully clunky translation of *Linneteil*, or "Linne Part") (*FL*, 34). Beckett had visited Ohlsdorf twice in October 1936, as John Pilling notes; Mark Nixon suggests he associates it with an 'absence of emotional sensitivity' and the failure to find 'creative inspiration' (Pilling 2006, 61; Nixon 2011, 113). Beckett had gone in search of the poet Friedrich Klopstock's grave, which, Chris Ackerley and S. E. Gontarski add, he later found in the cemetery at Christiankirce in Ottensen; *How It Is* (1964) [1961] remembers the mix-up ('though buried in Altona the shadow he casts').<sup>36</sup> Beckett did, however, happen upon the tomb of Carl Hagenbeck, a 'wild animal collector' mentioned in the novella (*FL*, 27). The bathos of looking for poetry and finding an eccentric amateur zoologist is evidently part of a joke, but it is not a very hurtful one. The Linne section did not exist when Hagenbeck was buried in 1913, though the narrator claims that he 'knew no one [else] there'; Otto Linne, whom it is named after, was the cemetery director from 1919 to 1933, overseeing the cemetery's expansion after the First World War (*FL*, 27).<sup>37</sup> And while the North-Eastern fraction of Ohlsdorf would have been on Prussian soil in 1936, prior to the Nazi's 1937 "Greater Hamburg Act", the Linne section would not.<sup>38</sup> It could be that Beckett had his bearings doubly wrong, but a historical reading provides another explanation. The Linne section of Ohlsdorf is the location of a number of

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<sup>36</sup> C. J. Ackerley and S. E. Gontarski, *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett: A Reader's Guide to His Works, Life, and Thought* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), p. 229. Beckett, *How It Is: A Critical-Genetic Edition*, ed. Edouard Magessa O'Reilly (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 53.

<sup>37</sup> Matthew Jeffries, *Hamburg: A Cultural and Literary History* (Oxford: Signal Books, 2010), pp. 52-3.

<sup>38</sup> 'Ohlsdorf Cemetery', Google Maps, 18 March 2017.

memorial sites for the victims of Nazism, including fighters from the Resistance, who were interred there on the 8th of September 1946, six weeks before Beckett started writing 'First Love'. The narrator, wandering around this part of the graveyard with his sandwiches and obligatory banana, pissing on the graves, is cheerfully outraging the ritual solemnity of public mourning, at a time when the victims of Nazism, including Beckett's own comrades, were still being buried. The text is making opportunistic use of recent history to unsettle its reader, in much the same way that 'The Expelled' did. But it is also, quite specifically, applying the destructive logic of melancholy to a scene of mourning. This reading holds whether or not Beckett knew of the recent interments at Ohlsdorf; any scene about a graveyard being desecrated would connote the same thing. It is as if the text was pointing to historical loss, and letting its reader know that it is *not* this loss that it is grieving. Beckett had allowed himself to participate in an apotropaic solemnity when he concluded *Watt*, a novel that conspicuously has nothing to do with the war, with the words 'Paris 1945', echoing the end of *Ulysses* (*Wa*, 223): '*Trieste-Zürich-Paris*'.<sup>39</sup> Less than a year and a half later, Beckett's narrators are savouring mass death as a mawkish aesthetic experience, a morally indifferent source of enjoyment ('I can almost shed a tear' (*FL*, 23)). What had changed over the course of that period, so that comradely, litotic stoicism has been replaced with this melancholy economy of hatred and denigration?

In melancholia, the love component of ambivalence is almost invisible as love. If it is there in Beckett, we have seen it turn in on the narrators as hatred, as they identify with sadistic authority figures and empathise with people who find them appropriately revolting. Then we have seen it turn back on the world, on weak and helpless figures whom the narrators can attack like they attack themselves, trying to get the work of melancholia started by 'devaluing' substitute objects instead. Finally, it is directed at the reader who is provoked and offended. What reason is there to think that we are not

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<sup>39</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 933.

the latest substitute object, denigrated and devalued, rather than being an ‘unknown loss’, provoking unmanageable ambivalence? Unlike their victims in the world of the text, the reader-object is also being cajoled and inveigled by the narrator, even perhaps seduced. A play of unavailability and specious availability – ‘I don’t deny it, for why deny it, and to whom, to you, to whom nothing is denied?’ – strings us along just enough to stay interested, giving us, like Clov in *Endgame* (1957), the bare minimum of what we need or want to sustain us (*Mo*, 41). We are, as Hamm threatens Clov he will be, ‘hungry all the time’.<sup>40</sup> The narrators of the siege are always ahead of the game, and the game is a sort of infinite striptease down to what *Proust* (1930) summarily dismissed as ‘the ideal core of the onion’.<sup>41</sup> We are waiting for the truth or the good or for love or for pleasure or for anything; and it is all stupendously valuable because there is so little of it. In ‘On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense’ (1873), Nietzsche says that philosophers have a bad habit of planting their ideas behind bushes and then pretending to stumble upon them.<sup>42</sup> If that is true, Beckett’s work is nearly pure shrubbery and there is something behind all of it. It is never what we want it to be, or rather it is always too readily what we want it to be, so that what we are really discovering is the crude id-content of our epistemophilia, a belittled craving to be the text’s exclusively privileged object. This is how we know we are not just another substitution to be killed off. We are made to want to be the ideal reader Beckett is indefinitely waiting for, because that is what he wants us to be. We are on the impossible other side of Freud’s melancholy ego, the ‘unknown’, unlocatable loss that triggers unmanageable ambivalence.

The historical individual Samuel Beckett was almost continually in mourning from the age of 27, when his first lover, Peggie Sinclair, and his Father, Bill, died

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<sup>40</sup> Beckett, *Endgame*, in *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 95.

<sup>41</sup> Beckett, *Proust*, in *Proust and Three Dialogues with George Duthuit* (London: John Calder Publishers, 1999), p. 29.

<sup>42</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, ‘On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense’, in Raymond Geuss (trans.) and Ronald Speirs (eds.), *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 147.



unexpectedly in the space of two months, up to and beyond the period I have been discussing in this chapter; his mother's death eerily coincided with Jérôme Lindon's agreement to publish *Molloy* in the Summer of 1950 ('I am in my mother's room. It is I who live there now' (*Mo*, 3)). Everything, as it were, goes dead when we read these texts diagnostically, as an example or even a healing parody of failed mourning that ends up looking like melancholia, the inability to locate loss in the world. The tendency of Beckett's work to go dead when it is approached with theory is not the exclusive privilege of psychoanalysis, but a theory of mourning is well placed to understand the deadening effect that it has on the texts. The next part of the chapter will try to formulate what is happening when this writing compels us to make it go dead, again psychoanalytically, before returning to Beckett to kill him off in return with a short, performative psychoanalytic reading of *Molloy*. It will conclude with a post-mortem of this performance, pointing towards the final chapter's discussion of equivalence.

In Laplanche and Pontalis's 1973 book *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, they write that '[t]he lack of a coherent theory of sublimation remains one of the lacunae in psychoanalytic thought' (433). Sublimation, from the Latin "sub" + "limen", "up to" + "a limit", is a process that, in Freud's early terms, 'displace' libidinal energy away from its 'first aim' onto a succession of replacement objects and activities.<sup>43</sup> There are two main ways of thinking about the relationship between art and sublimation in psychoanalysis, corresponding to the Freudian and Kleinian Schools. The former argues for the primacy of sexual instincts and the latter argues for the primacy of destructive ones.

In 'On Narcissism' (1914), Freud writes that

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<sup>43</sup> Freud, "'Civilised" Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness' (1908), in *S.E.* 14, pp. 177-204, p. 187.

Sublimation is a process that concerns object-libido and consists in the instinct [*Trieb*]<sup>44</sup> directing itself towards an aim other than, and remote from, that of sexual satisfaction; in this process the accent falls upon deflection from sexuality.<sup>45</sup>

This deflection of sexual energy involves a social valuation of the objects and activities it concerns. In the *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (1933), his final statement on the nature of sublimation, Freud writes that '[a] certain kind of modification of the aim and a change of object, in which our social valuation is taken into account, is described by us as "sublimation"'.<sup>46</sup> Sublimation, then, reroutes sexual energy away from objects and activities which are regarded as lacking in social value. A successful sublimation makes this energy available for, 'art', 'cultural achievements', and other 'higher' aims, as Freud puts it in the 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality' (1905).<sup>47</sup>

This account of sublimation is based on a normative trajectory of psychosexual development first set out in 'A Case of Hysteria', or 'Dora' (1905) [1901]. The healthy child is expected to progress from an 'undifferentiated sexual disposition' – or 'polymorphous perversity', as Freud terms it in the 'Three Essays' (Freud 1905, 191) – via the oral, anal and genital organisations of the libido, and beyond them to 'higher, asexual aims'.<sup>48</sup> Polymorphous perversity is characterised by an ability to experience sexual enjoyment with every part of the body and from any object or activity. This original resourcefulness of sexual enjoyment is, in the normal course of development,

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<sup>44</sup> One of the downsides of using the *Standard Edition* is James Strachey's terminological confusion over 'instinct' [*Instinkt*] and 'drive' [*Trieb*]. An instinct, for Freud, 'arises from sources of stimulation within the body, operates as a constant force and is such that the subject cannot escape from it by flight as he can from an external stimulus'. Instincts are concerned with self-preservation and as such are not available for sublimation (we cannot sublimate thirst, for example). Drives, by contrast, can be sublimated, and indeed must be up to a point. For example, the Death drive [*Todestrieb*] would prematurely lead us 'back into the inanimate state' if it was not sublimated to some extent. The role of the opposing sexual drive in the process of sublimation is an interesting but, to my knowledge, unresolved problem for Freudian psychoanalysis – though Klein offers a kind of solution, as we will see. Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, S.E. 22, p. 96. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), S.E. 18, p. 40.

<sup>45</sup> Freud, 'On Narcissism' (1914), S.E. 14, p. 94.

<sup>46</sup> Freud, *New Introductory Lectures* (1933), S.E. 22, p. 97.

<sup>47</sup> Freud, 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality' (1905), S.E. 7, pp. 156-157.

<sup>48</sup> Freud, 'Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria' ['Dora'] (1905) [1901], S.E. 7, p. 50.

restricted to erogenous zones and, finally, to the priority of genital satisfaction. This is a “higher” aim in so far as it represents the higher degree of organisation of the libido.

The canalisation of ‘undifferentiated’ sexual energy towards a single, sexual aim can only occur if psychic infrastructure is highly developed. It would seem that Freud is saying that the progress from lower to higher aims is a progress from undifferentiated sexual energy to sexual energy that prioritises a single object or activity. Sublimation, the deflection of object-libido away from sexuality towards aims with a higher ‘social valuation’, appears to be based on the quantitative elimination of the possible objects and activities of sexual enjoyment (Freud 1933, 97). In one sense, this is perfectly intuitive: the energy of an ‘undifferentiated sexual disposition’ squanders itself promiscuously on every sensation and object, with nothing left over for ‘cultural achievements’ and other “higher” aims. But in another sense, sublimation is exactly this diversification of libidinal aims, defined by the liberation of ‘energy for a great *number* of [...] cultural achievements’, a more promiscuous, undifferentiated enjoyment of objects and activities (Freud 1901, 50, *my italics*).

This theory is nearly what Leo Bersani concludes in a chapter, redeeming Freud, in *The Culture of Redemption* (1990). Sublimation is not the quantitative elimination of the possible objects and activities of sexual enjoyment; it is the name of the process which liberates sexual energy from fixation on specific objects: ‘[f]or the energy of the originating sublimation would be, by definition, a nonfixated energy’.<sup>49</sup> What enables or provokes the ‘undifferentiated sexual disposition’ of the child to move on to enjoy aims and objects that are ever more remote from original sexual satisfactions is, as Freud says in “‘Civilised’ Sexual Morality”, ‘[t]he capacity to exchange the original sexual aim for another aim, which is no longer sexual but which is psychically related’ (Freud 1908, 187). This capacity raises the question of what constitutes the kind of psychic relation which both requires and enables the exchange of one aim or object for another.

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<sup>49</sup> Leo Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* (Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University, 1990), p. 37.

By the time he gave the *New Introductory Lectures* in 1932 (they were published the following year), Freud knew better than to specify what the possible bases of psychic exchangeability might be. This was because, on the one hand, he realised that a too-explicit account would entail reducing artworks, which were devoutly important to him, to the status of symptoms or reaction-formations (albeit ‘socially valued’ ones); and on the other, that any lacunae in his theory, however devoutly well-intended, would constitute an admission that there was something beyond the explanatory power of psychoanalysis, which was very much not the way Freud worked. However, we can surmise from earlier texts what kind of psychic relation lends itself to the process of sublimation. In ‘Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood’ (1910), for example, Freud speculates that da Vinci’s prodigious talents were a result of his homosexuality, which he was able to express in his scientific and aesthetic interests (implicitly in the male body, though Freud curiously does not mention this outright).<sup>50</sup> This example implies that an originally sexual aim can harmoniously share the same object with a sublimated one, provided the activity is only ‘psychically related’. An exchange has occurred on the basis of a likeness between having sex and the pursuit of knowledge or the mastery of representation. Another form of relatedness comes up in the 1927 essay ‘On Fetishes’, albeit one that seemingly undoes the work of sublimation. Foot-fetishes, one might conservatively say, are a regressive desublimation of a normatively non-sexual part of the body. Here, Freud is confident that an exchange of object (rather than activity) has taken place on the basis of contiguity.<sup>51</sup> (Jacques Lacan would later argue that, since the unconscious is ‘structured like a language’, the trope of

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<sup>50</sup> There are two lines of argument in this essay. One is that Leonardo ‘displaced’ the memory of being nursed ‘at the mother’s breast’ onto ‘a passive homosexual phantasy’ of oral sex. The other is that ‘Leonardo passed the first years of his life alone with his mother’, and this led him to ‘ponder very passionately’ over ‘the great questions where do children come from and what has the father to do with their origin’. Pondering over the problem of origins endowed Leonardo with his investigative spirit, while his inhibited homosexuality directed it, via a somewhat far-fetched connection with the reproductive habits of the vulture, onto problems such as the nature of flight per se. Freud, ‘Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood’, *S.E.* 11, p. 87, p. 92.

<sup>51</sup> ‘Something else has taken [the female phallus’s] place, has been appointed its substitute, as it were, and now inherits the interest which was formerly directed to its predecessor.’ Freud, ‘On Fetishes’, *S.E.* 21, p. 154.

‘metonymy’ can be correlated with the psychic mechanism of ‘displacement’.)<sup>52</sup> The scenario Freud imagines is a child looking down in desire, fear and shame after seeing an adult’s genitals, transferring that psychic energy to the next object he beholds, the feet, where it becomes fixated forever. Likeness and nextness, then, might form the bases of the capacity to exchange the original sexual aim for another.

But if psychic relatedness is what enables the exchange to take place, what is the motivating force behind it? After all, a baby does not cheerfully volunteer to give up his undifferentiated sexual enjoyment for the sake of ‘higher’, ‘socially valued’ aims. In Freud’s account, sublimation occurs under the watchful duress of social prohibitions, which are internalised in the form of a super-ego. While society threatens us from without with ostracisation, the denial of satisfaction and even death, the super-ego stymies us from within with self-reproaches, inhibitions and anxieties, which in turn provokes frustration and destructive impulses.<sup>53</sup> But decisively, for Freud, it is sexuality that comes first.

The opposite is true for Klein. Sublimation is how we transform a primary destructiveness that would otherwise threaten our capacity for any benevolent relationality from the inside-out, not as a consequence of external prohibitions. The psychic processes which enable this transformation of destructive energy precede not only sexuality but the ability to use symbols, the awareness of what is outside and what is not, and the formation of the ego itself.

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<sup>52</sup> It is worth emphasising that Lacan uses his own trope to describe the linguistic structure of the unconscious, and it is simile rather than the straight swap of metaphor. Jacques Lacan, ‘Preface’, in Anika Lemaire, *Jacques Lacan*, trans. David Macey (London: Routledge, 2010 [1977]), p. xiv.

<sup>53</sup> This is a paraphrase of a formulation in *Civilisation and its Discontents* (1930) [1929]: ‘we are threatened with suffering from three directions: from our body, which is doomed to decay [...], from the external world which may rage against us with overwhelming and merciless force of destruction, and finally from our relations with other men. [...] This last source is perhaps more painful to use than any other’. I have omitted the problem of the ‘dissolution’ of the body and its attendant pains. Freud, *Civilisation and its Discontents*, *S.E.* 21, p. 77.

Klein's move away from a predominantly erotic view of the development of the psyche, and towards a theory of early life based on the priority of the destructive element, is sometimes attributed to the influence of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), the book in which Freud developed his theory of the death-drive.<sup>54</sup> But this is a somewhat misleading connection. Freud's intrapsychic model presents destructiveness as the executive branch of a sexuality all too impetuously ready to bankrupt itself at the slightest pretext. This is not to be confused with Klein's intersubjective model of destructiveness as a benign form of debt-slavery, a common bondage in envy, guilt and gratitude, the basis – in theory – of a genuinely negotiated reality. Destructiveness for Klein is, I will suggest, much more like an attempt to resolve Freud's economic problem of mourning than it is a development of his death-drive. Like Freud, Klein is positing a deficit that the ego will never be enough to repay. But unlike Freud, Klein's solution to the problem is to *do* things, not to inadequately replace them: to be nice, to make art, to give sexual pleasure, etc. The word she uses for this is 'reparation'.<sup>55</sup>

In its primitive form, reparation describes the process by which a baby feels it is making amends for its destructive feelings towards its primary caregiver – or, strictly speaking, the 'part-object' which stands for them (initially, for Klein 'the mother's breast' and (secondarily) 'the father's penis').<sup>56</sup> These destructive feelings come about for a number of reasons. The baby might be angry 'that the milk comes too quickly or

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<sup>54</sup> One of Klein's most prominent followers, Hanna Segal, describes the influence as follows: Klein 'became convinced of the importance of innate aggression, and was the only major follower of Freud to *fully* adopt its clinical implications. [...] Her approach to anxiety and guilt is more in keeping with Freud's later formulations than with his earlier ones'. We will return to Segal in her own right in a moment. Hanna Segal, *Melanie Klein* (London: Penguin Books, 1981), p. 2.

<sup>55</sup> The first formulation of the concept of 'reparation' telling appears in connection with artworks. Melanie Klein, 'Infantile Anxiety-Situations Reflected in a Work of Art and in the Creative Impulse', in Roger Money Kyrle (ed.), *Love Guilt and Reparation and Other Works, 1921-1945* (New York: The Free Press, 1975), p. 214.

<sup>56</sup> '[T]hese part objects are from the beginning associated in the infant's mind with the mother and father. Day-to-day experiences with his parents, and the unconscious relation which develops to them as inner objects, come increasingly to cluster round these primary part-objects and add to their prominence in the child's unconscious'. Klein, 'The Oedipus Complex in the Light of Early Anxieties', in Roger Money Kyrle (ed.), *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works 1921-1945* (New York: Macmillan Inc., 1984 [1945]), p. 408.

too slowly; or that he was not given the breast when he most craved it'.<sup>57</sup> He may envy the breast's capacity to feed and soothe and care for him, and, through his utter helplessness and dependency, he may experience this as a kind of extortion, an unrepayable debt.

In 'Love, Guilt and Reparation' (1937), Klein's first full account of the latter concept, '[t]he baby's first object of love and hate [...] is both desired and hated with all the intensity and strength that is characteristic of the early urges of the baby'.<sup>58</sup> This ambivalence brings about 'a kind of mental activity which I take to be the most primitive one: phantasy-building, or more colloquially, imaginative thinking' (Klein 1937, 308). These phantasies, Klein says, can be both 'pleasant' and 'destructive': 'for instance, the baby who feels a craving for the mother's breast when it is not there may imagine it to be there'; or when 'he is being gratified by the breast, he may have phantasies of a pleasant kind in relation to it' (Klein 1937, 308). By contrast, if the breast 'frustrates' him in some way, if he has a 'grievance' against it, then he may have correspondingly 'destructive phantasies': 'he wishes to bite up and up his mother and her breasts, and to destroy her also in other ways' (Klein 1937, 308). This is a deceptively comic idea. The baby is terrorised at first by his helplessness, which is transformed into violent phantasy as a way of mastering it. Then he is terrorised by his own will, which, because there is little distinction between phantasy and reality yet, he experiences as omnipotent, threatening to annihilate this object that he loves as he loves himself, with the utmost extremity of need. His mission becomes to save the day, *infans ex machina*, from himself, riding in all-powerfully to rescue his beloved from his all-powerful destructiveness, setting up a recurring pattern of jeopardy and rescue, jeopardy and rescue, like the plot of a superhero blockbuster.

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<sup>57</sup> Klein, 'Envy and Gratitude', in Roger Money Kyrle (ed.), *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works 1946-1963* (New York: Macmillan, 1975), p. 185.

<sup>58</sup> Klein, 'Love, Guilt and Reparation', in *Love, Guilt and Reparation*, p. 306.

It is never entirely clear, from Klein's several accounts, how the protagonist is able to escape this Manichean drama, and perhaps they never quite do. But her many followers have adumbrated a kind of way out, which is, crucially for this argument, to do with loss, sublimation and symbol formation. I will touch on two of them, here, D.W. Winnicott and Hanna Segal, before returning the way I came, through Klein and Freud to Beckett.

Winnicott provides an intuitive account of the process by which early omnipotence-feeling is given up in his 1969 essay 'The Use of an Object and Relating through Identifications'. Winnicott agrees with Klein that 'the first impulse of the subject [...] is destructive': that the baby experiences its dependency on the caregiver as persecution and 'destroys' them in 'fantasy'.<sup>59</sup> But when he discovers that the caregiver has survived his attacks, that his or her or their attitude has not changed towards him, then the baby is able to recognise the caregiver as an object that lies outside the sphere of his power. For the first time he is able to distinguish between his inner life and the "shared" reality' of 'the world of objects' (Winnicott 2005, 122). Winnicott describes this process as a chiasmus: the cathected object is at the same time 'becoming destroyed because real, becoming real because destroyed', much as Beckett's audience came out of inexistence under his merciless attacks (Winnicott 2005, 121). For Winnicott, this is the origin, not only of the baby's awareness of a world outside himself, but of his capacity for 'love' (and later, for 'guilt' and 'concern'):

The subject says to the object: 'I destroyed you', and the object is there to receive the communication. From now on the subject says: 'Hullo object!' 'I destroyed you.' 'I love you. You have value to me because of your survival of my destruction of you. While I am loving you I am all the time destroying you in (unconscious) fantasy' (Winnicott 2005, 121).

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<sup>59</sup> D. W. Winnicott, 'The Use of an Object and Relating through Identifications', in *Playing and Reality* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 121, 120.



Here we have our first ‘inner object’ or ‘symbol’.<sup>60</sup> The creation of this symbol, which is available for destruction and reparation in phantasy, creates the inner world it exists in, drawing for the first time a distinction between reality and phantasy. That distinction is only possible if an object is available for destruction in phantasy which is able, in reality, to survive. Its existence as an external object depends on us fashioning a symbol for it which remains under our omnipotent control. The fact that it is demonstrably *not* this inner object is how we come to know that it exists in reality.

‘The symbol’, writes Hanna Segal in ‘Notes on Symbol Formation’ (1957), ‘is needed to displace aggression from the original object and in this way to lessen the guilt and the fear of loss’.<sup>61</sup> This is the all-consuming dread the baby feels that it has destroyed the thing it loves, the thing without which it would be itself destroyed. The baby now has an internal representation of the object which it can love and hate, attack and repair, to its heart’s content without experiencing annihilating feelings of guilt. Once it has this symbol at its disposal, it is able to start the process of sublimation. This is how Klein describes the process in ‘The Role of Symbol Formation in Ego Development’ (1930):

symbolism is the foundation of all sublimation and of every talent, since it is by way of symbolic equation that things, activities and interests become the subject of libidinal phantasies. (Klein 1930, 220)

However, because the symbols which these phantasies involve still carry some of the anxiety occasioned by the child’s feeling towards the original object, he is obliged to find ever new objects in order to assuage his anxiety:

owing to this equation these [new objects] in turn become objects of anxiety, and so he is impelled constantly to make other and new equations, which form the basis of his interest in the new objects and of symbolism. (Klein 1930, 220)

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<sup>60</sup> Winnicott uses ‘inner object’ and ‘inner’ or ‘mental representation’ interchangeably, with a preference for the latter. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, e.g. p. 8 (‘inner object’), p. 30, p. 129, p. 131 (‘inner’ or ‘mental representation’).

<sup>61</sup> Segal, ‘Notes on Symbol Formation’, in *The Work of Hanna Segal: A Kleinian Approach to Clinical Practice* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc., 1990 [1957]), p. 55.

Klein is now bringing her account in line with the Freudian orthodoxy about sublimation, in which libidinal energy is displaced from its original object onto a chain of substitutes, making this energy available for ‘socially valued’ aims rather than ‘undifferentiated’ sexual desire. For Klein, however, the motive force behind this displacement is, as I have said, originally destructive in nature rather than sexual, though it is worth pointing out that both are experienced by the child as anxiety. While Freudian aesthetics is a much more developed field, I would suggest that Klein’s emphasis on the destructive element has the potential to provide a more precise and productive account of sublimation, with regard to Beckett at least.<sup>62</sup> For Freud, sublimation takes place on the basis of an ambiguous form of ‘psychic relatedness’, perhaps metaphoric, perhaps – though probably not “healthily” – metonymic. For Klein, it is specifically an excessive relatedness or ‘equation’ between symbol and object which impels the child towards new, less related objects and activities (Klein 1930, 220).

Sublimation proper can only be said to begin when the symbols, objects and activities used by the child are sufficiently *remote* from the original, anxiety-triggering ones that they are able to avert what Segal, following Klein, calls ‘symbolic equation’.<sup>63</sup> It is only after ‘repeated experiences of loss, recovery, and recreation’ of the original object, after a long enough sequence of displacements of ‘affects and interests’ away from it, Segal writes in ‘Notes on Symbol Formation’, that the child is able to ‘recognise, respect, and use’ the particular ‘properties’ of empirical objects without inhibiting

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<sup>62</sup> There are relatively few psychoanalysts associated with Kleinian aesthetics, as Nicky Glover shows in *Psychoanalytic Aesthetics* (2009). “‘Orthodox’ Kleinian aesthetics’, she writes, is ‘articulated mainly by Segal’, with Marion Milner, Donald Meltzer, Anton Ehrenzweig and Harris Williams named as offshoots. Wilfred Bion is only addressed second-hand in terms of his ‘legacy’, and Adrian Stokes is dwelt on at length despite the fact he was not an analyst. The most developed account of Kleinian aesthetics appears in Lyndsey Stonebridge’s *The Destructive Element* (1998), which discusses Klein in relation to Lionel Trilling and I. A. Richards (‘very strange bedfellows’); Woolf, Fry and Bloomsbury; Stokes; Milner; and Stevie Smith. Nicky Glover, *Psychoanalytic Aesthetics: An Introduction to the British School* (London: Karnac, 2009), p. 78, p. 103. Lyndsey Stonebridge, *The Destructive Element: British Psychoanalysis and Modernism* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1998), p. 17.

<sup>63</sup> Segal, *Dream, Fantasy and Art* (London: Routledge, 1991), e.g. p. 26.

feelings of guilt or persecution (Segal 1990, 50, 55). This is precisely because they are not equivalent – not identical, to almost slip into Adorno’s terminology – to their symbolic counterparts in the inner world.<sup>64</sup> It is only after this long series of substitutions has occurred, that symbols and objects can be used freely in sublimation without risking a psychotic short-circuit, in which the libidinal energy that has been displaced onto ever more remote objects discharges in or near the original one, loosing all the terrifying destructiveness – in the Freudian model – of the internalised social prohibitions that prompted sublimation in the first place.

Segal’s understated but brilliant insight is that, since symbolic substitutions are made on the basis of ‘psychic relatedness’, it is psychic relatedness which can also undo those substitutions. In ‘Notes on Symbol Formation’, she gives the example a concert musician whom she treated in hospital for psychosis. When asked why he could no longer tolerate the thought of playing the violin, he ‘answered with violence, “*Do you expect me to masturbate in public?*”’ (Segal 1990, 49, her emphases). In *Dream, Phantasy and Art* (1991), Segal returns to this case study, contrasting the violinist’s ‘concrete thinking’, in which symbols and objects are felt to be identical, with the ‘symbolic representation’ of “true” symbolism, in which the symbol ‘represents the object’ without being ‘entirely equated with it’ (Segal 1990, 27). The non-identity of symbol and object is what enables sublimation to exchange one aim for another. While Freud emphasised ‘psychic relatedness’ in his account of sublimation, Segal was the first psychoanalyst to fully acknowledge the importance of non-relatedness in the process of successful symbol formation. Symbolic equivalence has the power to undo psychic organisation to the point that sublimation is impossible, transforming all libidinal energy back to its ‘undifferentiatedly’ sexual or destructive state, raining down all the fury of the super-ego and the social prohibitions and values it has internalised.

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<sup>64</sup> ‘Dialectics is the consistent sense of nonidentity’. Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1973), p. 5.

‘The danger’ truly is, as Beckett put it in the first sentence of his first published text, ‘in the neatness of identifications’.<sup>65</sup>

Molloy begins his chronicle by ending up in his mother’s bed, which is too direct to be a sexual innuendo, though it might be a destructive one: ‘[i]t’s I who live there now’: Molloy exists where his mother, who brought him into existence, does not (*Mo*, 3). How did this happen? He has had an unaccountable need to see his mother; he has, at last, inexplicably arrived where she should be in the world; but instead of finding her there, at the beginning of his story, he has discovered an absence, the place where she once ‘live[d]’ but does no longer, since it is he who lives (there) now. One can hear a kind of triumph ringing out from the archaic syntax, translated as directly as possible from the original French, almost retaining the rhythm: ‘*C’est moi qui y vis maintenant*’.<sup>66</sup> ‘It’s I who live there now’. The “I”, by coming later than the beginning of the sentence, where we expect to find it modestly tucked away to be over and done with as soon as possible, seems, like Hamm, to insist on being right ‘in the centre’.<sup>67</sup> This gives the sentence a kind of run up to its putatively central point, the ego, while also leaving it despotically imbalanced, providing a sufficient number of syllables for the “I” to thunder out over. It has the peculiar effect of sounding at once triumphant and rather sad and silly: a drum-roll (‘It’s *Iiiii...*’) petering out over a few unstressed, unresponsive syllables (‘... who live there now’), the sovereign ego presiding over an empty, annihilated kingdom.

In an aggressively facile psychoanalytic reading of this novel, one which it undoubtedly invites, we might be tempted to say that Molloy, on the way to his mother’s bed, is like an aspiring symbolic equation. He is bent on returning to his origin, but is obliged by objects and resistances to take detours. The first object is a policeman, the archetype of the superego, which, in Freud, is the internalised paternal prohibition, originally the prohibition on incest. The policeman stops him and asks for

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<sup>65</sup> Beckett, ‘Dante... Bruno. Vico... Joyce’, in *Disjecta*, p. 19.

<sup>66</sup> Beckett, *Molloy* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1982), p. 7.

<sup>67</sup> Beckett, *Endgame*, in *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 126.

his papers, his ID, or *id*, and he hands over some soiled rags, a sort of dirty protest, the psychoanalytic baby ‘messing’ itself in spite and distress.<sup>68</sup> (It is important to make an aside here to emphasise the feeling of boredom and deadness that a reading like this provokes in both the writer and, it must be hoped and presumed, in the reader.) As I mentioned in the first chapter, Beckett had read some Adler, Jones, and a summary of Freud; he had a form of analysis with Bion and he was deeply sceptical about the whole fiasco. He knows that a certain kind of reader of *Molloy* – almost any “cultivated” reader in the 1950s – will want to make this reading and he wants them to get on with it. So I will. Molloy is wandering like a symbol on the way home to his mother and is diverted from his aim in humorous episodic ways. At one point he ends up at the beach, which is interesting in view of the undifferentiatedness it is said to represent and of Freud's ‘oceanic feeling’, and so on.<sup>69</sup> In this connection Molloy might even be said to be a kind of river, springing out from point ‘A’ on the top of a mountain or ‘considerable eminence’, conspicuous for its artifice in ‘this land with hardly a ripple’, working his way down to the estuary at the end of every life of desire (*Mo*, 10). But Molloy does not come to rest at the sea, which is death after all and not his mother – though he does replenish his supply of ‘sucking stones’, pebbles worn down by the inexorable tide to a smooth roundness, inert by preference, suitable for an oral fix (*Mo*, 63). Then he heads back inland, where he arrives at a forest. Dante’s narrator loses himself ‘halfway through the journey of our life’, the point of maximum tension between the pull of regression and the push of extinction, before Virgil shows up and takes him on a guided tour of hell.<sup>70</sup> Molloy, conversely, has no guide except his ruined wits and cannot find his way out of the forest. He tries to take the shortest route out, by the hypotenuse as it

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<sup>68</sup> This is Wilfred Bion’s evocative word for the most primitive, somatic form of distress: ‘[t]he infant suffers pangs of hunger and feels it’s dying; racked by guilt and anxiety and impelled by greed, it messes itself and cries. The mother picks it up, feeds it and comforts it and eventually the infant sleeps.’ Wilfred Bion, *Elements of Psychoanalysis* (London: Heinemann, 1963), p. 31.

<sup>69</sup> This famous phrase is from the ‘Introduction’ to *Civilisation and its Discontents*, *S.E.* 21, p. 64.

<sup>70</sup> Dante Alighieri, *Dante’s Inferno*, ed. and trans. Mark Musa (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 3.

were, but because of his limping gait, or some other innate bias, he instead goes round in circles. Like his original journey, which was intended to take him to his mother directly, this direct path becomes literally circuitous, elliptical. If his aim were a word or a symbol which he could say, both of these attempted journeys would be circumlocutions, dancing or rather limping around the point, or a point in lieu of it. (In the forest, though, the point has ceased to be the original one, his mother, and is now a subjective one, himself.) To break this vicious circle or ellipsis, he applies his mathematical reason: if taking aim at the object directly has had the outcome of circumlocution, then surely, by reversing the terms, setting out in a circle will produce a straight line? He attempts this and then he encounters a stranger 'at a crossroads', flagrantly like Oedipus and Laius, whom he murders before falling in a ditch (*Mo*, 77). 'I longed to back into the forest', he says in conclusion. 'Oh not a real longing' (*Mo*, 85). And that is the last thing we hear from Molloy.

If Molloy, the character, is too much like a symbol for the dynamics of symbol formation, if his thwarted journey to an original object is too much like the tension in a symbol as it tries to discharge itself in the nearest convenient equivalence, mimicking the experience of reading and writing about Beckett, then *Molloy*, the novel, might be said to be a symbolic equation for a symbolic equation, a short-circuit of a short-circuit. 'I am in my mother's room'. Where is there to go after that? And what is there to say about it?

The feeling of not knowing what to say about something, a text in this instance, has two explanations according to the psychoanalytic models that have been discussed. One is inhibition. Inhibition occurs when the guilt or anxiety that arises from an internalised prohibition on desire is too great for a successful sublimation to occur. This might happen because the sublimated object was inadequate (that is, it was too close in some way to the original desire), or because environmental factors mean that the anxiety has increased such that it swallows up the sublimated object, transforming

it back into the original desire. The second explanation is that the faculty of symbolisation as such has been undone. It is not that one particular symbol or symbolic territory is suddenly swallowed up by a primitive desire. It is that the ability to use symbols at all has been compromised. This would be one way of interpreting the circular logic of the phrase in the addendum of *Watt*, 'no symbols where none intended' (*Wa*, 223). Intentionality and the substitutive work of symbolism are, in this account, coeval. If words fail me, Beckett seems to be saying, it is because my desire has encountered a prohibition but will not work around it, will not accept any substitutes for the original object. The prohibition that makes me give up what I want in exchange for something else is not acceptable to me. I will not accept this loss no matter what the authority is, even if it is 'reality passing the verdict', 'even if a substitute is beckoning' (Freud 2005, 205). I will not give it up for anything, which eventually means language use altogether.

Freud's 'Mourning and Melancholia' describes Beckett's obstinate refusal of substitutes in terms of a logic of value. Mourning is economically impossible because the object's value is too high when it is unavailable for the ego to give up. Value, in this theory, depends on ambivalence: because the object is unavailable it is hated, and this is what makes it so impossibly costly to decaject. The object that is destroyed in fantasy is mourned in fantasy, and becomes more valuable because of its destruction, so more hateful for its unavailability, so more lovable, etc. Mourning finds a way to value other objects as much as the lost one, but melancholia does not. Melancholia takes economic impossibility seriously, and refuses to devalue the object enough to detach its libido from it, or refuses to value other objects enough to do the same, which amounts to the same thing. The melancholic ego is now valuing an object that is not there and therefore cannot value it back, leading to the 'hyper-cathexis' that Freud describes, or a hyperbolic increase in value (love -> not there -> destroyed in fantasy -> even less there -> loved more for unavailability, etc.). Melancholia that won't end implies an object that is infinitely valuable.

Judith Butler, writing on Freud in her post-9/11 book *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence* (2004), draws attention to the role of substitution in mourning: 'successful mourning [means] being able to exchange one object for another'.<sup>71</sup> I have argued that Freud's theory of sublimation presupposes the ability to exchange objects for one another on the basis of 'psychic relatedness'. By contrast, in Segal's theory of symbol formation, equivalence causes a short-circuit in the signifying chain, sending the aggressive or erotic energy back to the original object, as in the example of the psychotic violinist. ('Love requited [...] is a short-circuit', the theoretical spokesperson of *Murphy* is made to say (*Mu*, 5).) The symbolic equivalence which sends us back to square one of unsublimated, undifferentiated object-libido might produce, as in Beckett and in reading him, a vertiginous or distressing experience of speechlessness, where 'love take[s] flight into the ego [...] to escape abolition'. But it must also be a sublethal dose of the amorphous, presocialised energy that was once available for something unexchangeable, whose material impossibility the next chapter will address.

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<sup>71</sup> Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), p. 20.



#### 4. Safe Words.

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*Do not get silly ideas into yr head about hurting. It is I the hurter of the two.*

- Samuel Beckett, letter to Pamela Mitchel, 14 August 1954.<sup>1</sup>

*The most scandalous part of a scandal is getting used to it.*

- Simone de Beauvoir, 'For Djamila Boupacha', *Le Monde*, 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1960.<sup>2</sup>

In the last chapter we saw how, at a certain point in the work of melancholia, a non-existent object is imagined that is infinitely valuable. The ego that creates or remembers this object's possibility does so at the cost of its self-worth, since the object is, by definition, not available. The value that it conferred on the lost object is (as Freud understands it) inverted and turned inwards, because the ego considers the loss to be a reflection of its valuelessness. As a valueless thing, it wants to 'abandon' or 'abolish' itself, i.e. commit suicide.<sup>3</sup> However, it is persuaded not to do this somehow, perhaps because the value of 'the sum of narcissistic satisfactions it derives from life' prevents it from doing so (Freud 2005, 215). Whatever the source, the implication is that there is something valuable in staying alive, and this implies a contradiction. If the ego is valueless, but is capable of experiencing value, then value exists in a valueless thing. Valuelessness, like value, can't just disappear in Freud's closed system; it has to go somewhere. So it is projected outwards onto substitute objects, where 'countless

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Beckett, *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Vol. 2, 1941-1956*, eds. George Craig, Martha Dow Fehsenfeld, Dan Gunn and Lois More Overbeck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 492.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Simone de Beauvoir and Gisèle Halimi, *Djamila Boupacha* (Paris: Galimard, 1962), p. 220. My translation.

<sup>3</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', trans. Shaun Whiteside, in Maud Ellmann and Adam Phillips (eds.), *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia* (London: Penguin Classics, 2005), p. 211.

separate struggles' of ambivalence play out (Freud 2005, 216). The ego now has an economic problem that it can work out, in a way that is not dissimilar to mourning. 'Just as mourning impels the ego to renounce the object by declaring its death', Freud says, 'so does each single struggle of ambivalence [in melancholia] loosen the fixation of the libido to the object by devaluing, disparaging and, so to speak, even killing it' (Freud 2005, 217). Melancholia is '[brought] to an end' when this sacrificial object, not the ego, is successfully 'abandoned as worthless' (Freud 2005, 217). The object has taken the place of the worthless ego, which 'enjoy[s] the satisfaction of acknowledging itself to be the better of the two, the superior object', the more valuable one (Freud 2005, 217).

In 'Envy and Gratitude' (1957), Melanie Klein suggests an inner link between this kind of sadistic impulse – which for Klein means a specifically oral form of sadism, the impulse to 'devour' – and a logic of substitution or, as she puts it, 'exchange':

[Idealisation] tends to break down and then one love object may have to be frequently exchanged for another; for no such person can fully come up to expectations. The former idealised person is then often felt as a persecutor (which shows the origin of idealisation as a counterpart to persecution)<sup>4</sup>

Klein is describing an aspect of the 'paranoid-schizoid' position (Klein 1957, 191). The paranoid-schizoid position is a primitive stage in the development of the ego, characterised by the inability to reconcile 'good' and 'bad' qualities in a single 'person' or object (Klein 1957, 191-2). Objects are split into idealised and repudiated elements, a mechanism which, when it is set in motion, looks like the frequent exchange that is described here. At the 'height' of 'the splitting process', Klein notes in an earlier essay, 'the injured object may very swiftly change into a persecutor, and the urge to repair or revive the loved object may turn into the need to pacify and propitiate a persecutor'.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Melanie Klein, 'Envy and Gratitude', in Roger Money Kyrle (ed.), *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works 1946-1963* (New York: Macmillan, 1975), p. 193.

<sup>5</sup> Klein, 'The Theory of Anxiety and Guilt' (1948), in *Envy and Gratitude*, pp. 36-7.

She adds that '[t]he fear of numerous persecutors has not only an anal-sadistic origin, [...] but an oral one as well'.<sup>6</sup>

Jessica Benjamin continues Klein's analysis in *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problem of Domination* (1988). Benjamin understands sadistic domination in Hegelian terms as the failure of subjects to 'recognise' one another. 'Recognition', Benjamin writes,

is that response from the other which makes meaningful the feelings, intentions and actions of the self. It allows the self to realise its agency and authorship in a tangible way. But such recognition can only come from another whom we, in turn, recognise as a person in his or her own right.<sup>7</sup>

When subjects encounter each other unequally, they are in danger of entrenching their positions by adopting "dominant" and "submissive" stances, which may indefinitely arrest the movement towards mutual recognition. For Benjamin, the stronger position refuses to recognise the other as an equal because his identity depends, ironically, on repudiating dependency on the other. The weaker position interprets this repudiation correctly as a lack of recognition, and experiences it as a need to be recognised. This need is perceived by the stronger position as a proof of the unworthiness of the weaker position, which disqualifies them from being able to provide the recognition they themselves, however Pyrrhically, have been coveting from the beginning. This impasse can be articulated, from the weaker position, by Iris Murdoch's incorrect but useful formulation of Adorno's negative dialectic: 'the subject needs the object more than the object needs the subject'.<sup>8</sup> Subjects encounter each other unequally when a power structure like this has come to be expected.

Murdoch's power structure holds at both the individual and social levels. Individually, a person might unconsciously expect to occupy the strong or weak

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<sup>6</sup> Klein, 'The Psycho-Analysis of Children' (1932), in *Envy and Gratitude*, p. 146.

<sup>7</sup> Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problem of Domination* (New York: Random House, 1988), p. 12.

<sup>8</sup> Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (London: Vintage, 2003), p. 374.

position, and project this expectation onto every new encounter, reinforcing the unconscious projection. Societally, individual expectations harden into “scripts” which obtain to particular identity positions, casting individuals in one role or the other. The ‘problem of domination’ therefore describes the encounter between subjects who expect to be powerful and weak, and who develop strategies to inhabit their positions with the minimum of anxiety and suffering. The “dominant” strategy is to assert ‘there is room for only one ego in any relationship’, and the “submissive” strategy is to find ways of enjoying, through masochism, identification and possession, being ‘obliterated’ by a worthy subject (Benjamin 1988, 39). These strategies engender relationships that Benjamin, citing Margaret Mahler and D. W. Winnicott, describes in terms of infantile ‘omnipotence’ feelings and parental otherness:

The parent has ceased to function as an other who sets a boundary to the child’s will, and the child experiences this as abandonment; the parent co-opts all the child’s intentions by agreement, pushing him back into an illusory oneness where he has no agency of his own. The child will rebel against this oneness by insisting on having his way even more absolutely. The child who feels that others are extensions of himself must constantly fear the emptiness and loss of connection that result from his fearful power. Only he exists; the other is effaced, has nothing real to give him. The painful result of success in the battle for omnipotence is that to win is to win nothing: the result is negation, emptiness, isolation. (Benjamin 1988, 35)

Unable to admit this other as a being endowed with subjectivity enough to recognise him, the subject instead seeks to dominate them. To begin with, he does this by communicating, in myriad daily ways, his refusal to accept them as separate, equal agents. As the scales of power tilt further and further in the direction of this subject, he imputes his frustration to perceived shortcomings in the object. His attempts to extort recognition from them increasingly denies them any agency at all. Eventually, he will feel that he has destroyed – or in psychoanalytic symbology, “eaten” – the object he has taken for an other. He will, as Klein says, ‘exchange’ them, moving on to the next human meal in a never-ending series, playing out a predetermined narrative of abandonment -> domination -> abandonment. He will, what’s more, fly from them as a ‘persecutor’, as a terrifying threat to *his* subjectivity, not theirs. If the subject is unable

to encounter an other at the limits of his power, he never learns where he ends and the world begins. This inability makes everything interchangeable, even fantasy and reality, since the primitive faculty of discriminating between what is self and what is other is undone. If the object is not credited with 'surviving' his fantasies of destruction, no negotiated reality emerges from the hallucinatory mess of impulses and resistances that exists before we do. Benjamin's Kleinian subject is not Freud's imperious monster, 'His Majesty the Baby', frightened out of pleasurable omnipotence by the introjected prohibitions of the Reality Principle. He experiences omnipotence as persecution, terrified at every moment he will destroy the object on which he depends on for his existence.

The interchangeability of objects and fantasies, for this subject, looks like everyone else's destruction, but in reality it is his own. He longs for a shared reality as if his life depended it, which it does. The symbolic efficiency of words depends on it, too. For Hanna Segal, the only way we come to know something exists is because it is not interchangeable with its symbolic counterpart in our 'inner world', as we saw in the last chapter. 'The symbol', she writes, 'is needed to displace aggression from the original object and in this way to lessen the guilt and the fear of loss'.<sup>9</sup> It is only after 'repeated experiences of loss, recovery, and recreation' of that original object, after a long enough sequence of displacements of 'affects and interests' away from it, that the subject is able to 'recognise, respect, and use' the particular 'properties' of empirical objects without inhibiting feelings of guilt or persecution (Segal 1990, 50, 55). If the subject is unable to do this, he will regard symbols and objects as interchangeable, like people, and will not be able to discriminate between tropes and representations, words and things.<sup>10</sup>

This chapter is about what happens when gendered social violence does damage to the efficacy of words. It is also about Beckett's movement away from his post-war

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<sup>9</sup> Hanna Segal, 'Notes on Symbol Formation', in *The Work of Hanna Segal: A Kleinian Approach to Clinical Practice* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc., 1990 [1957]), p. 55.

<sup>10</sup> Segal, *Dream, Fantasy and Art* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 27.

aesthetics of ‘vague[n]g’, where the referents have been ambiguated or expunged, and towards a post-post-war aesthetics of overdetermination, where a single word, name or conceit has more than one determinate referent.<sup>11</sup> As I have suggested in chapters 2 and 3, Beckett’s insistence on purging his writing of nearly all deictic markers in the post-war period suggests an almost superstitious reverence for the efficacy of words (e.g. ‘[a] little yes, a little no, enough to exterminate a regiment of dragoons’).<sup>12</sup> In *How It Is* (1964) [1961], Beckett’s brazen, interchangeable use of legalistic acronyms (“*pris les armes à la main*” or “PAM”) and disquieting personal material (‘Pim Pam’ or Pamela Mitchell) points to a spent and ineffectual language, perhaps specifically a discourse of protest that was incapable of sustaining effective opposition to the Algerian War and the torture crisis it precipitated in 1957. David Lloyd has discussed that crisis in terms of Kant’s ethical formalism and the ‘system of representation’ on which it depends.<sup>13</sup> Torture’s indifference to the suffering individual is preserved as form in a ‘logic of substitution’, but there is nothing to indicate that it is torture in Algeria that the text is specifically referring to, despite that subject dominating public discourse throughout the period of composition; it may not even refer to the physical act of torture at all (Lloyd 2010, 212). Adam Piette sees an abstract ‘dialectic of victim and perpetrator’ in the text’s torture scenes, and links it to Sartre’s ‘Colonialism is a System’ (1957), which he regards as the discursive ‘trigger’ for Beckett in 1958.<sup>14</sup> This chapter argues, first, that the misperception of *How It Is* as a continuation of Beckett’s post-war formalism means that Lloyd has overlooked an explicit historical referent concerning the Algerian War; and second, that the historical is adamantly not the one Piette identifies. Drawing on recent historical work and journalism from the time, I will claim that Beckett is

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<sup>11</sup> Rosemary Pountney, *Theatre of Shadows: Samuel Beckett’s Drama, 1956-1976* (Gerard’s Cross: Colin Smythe, 1988), p. 149.

<sup>12</sup> Beckett, *The Unnamable*, in *Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies and The Unnamable* (New York: Grove Press, 2009), p. 297.

<sup>13</sup> David Lloyd, *Irish Culture and Colonial Modernity 1800–2000: The Transformation of Oral Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 212.

<sup>14</sup> Adam Piette, ‘Torture, Text, Human Rights: Beckett’s *Comment c’est* / *How It Is* and the Algerian War’, in Allan Hepburn (ed.), *Around 1945: Literature, Citizenship, Human Rights* (London: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2016), p. 152, 158.

using historical and personal material, or ‘particularity’, in a twisted parody of the ‘logic of substitution’ the text waveringly condemns as the basis of torture (Lloyd 2010, 212). It concludes that Beckett’s overlapping fascinations with gendered violence and exchange are intimately related to the resistance of his writing to persuasive historical or political restatements.

In *Irish Culture and Colonial Modernity 1800–2000: The Transformation of Oral Space* (2010), David Lloyd notes that it is customary for critics discussing *How It Is* to provide a summary of the text before they discuss it, since there is so little consensus about what transpires between its covers (Lloyd 2011, 201). *How is it*, the text makes us ask, putting it in the position of Pim, an object tortured into broken eloquence. *How It Is* opens with a narrative plan which divides the text into three ‘parts’ in relation to an encounter (‘before Pim with Pim after Pim’ (*HII*, 3)). This is followed by a description of the narrator and his circumstances, including an inventory of his belongings; *Molloy* (1951) [1948], *Malone Dies* (1951) and *The Unnamable* (1953) began in the same way. Like his predecessors the narrator appears to be alone, but this time he is prostrate in the dark in a universe of mud, like Dante’s wrathful. Indeed, several critics have identified Dantean elements in *How It Is*. John Fletcher notes the importance of Canto 7, where the immoderately angry are condemned to attack and bite one another forever; Beckett may have taken this cue for his universe of sadomasochistic dyads, who among other things devour one another (screams give ‘more nourishment [...] than sardines can ever offer’ (*HII*, 189)).<sup>15</sup> Daniella Caselli refers to a transcription in the ‘Whoroscope’ notebook from the same Canto, which emphasises ‘the black mire’ or mud in which the damned are immured; Caselli argues that mud is correlated with the materiality of speech.<sup>16</sup> Russell Smith picks up this thought and develops it in a discussion of testimony, noticing that both Virgil and Krim/Kram are transcribing their

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<sup>15</sup> John Fletcher, *Samuel Beckett’s Art* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1971), p. 118.

<sup>16</sup> Daniella Caselli, *Beckett’s Dantes: Intertextuality in the Fiction and Criticism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 169.

texts from speech that is gargled in mud; Smith interprets this image as a ‘problematic of bearing witness to alterity’.<sup>17</sup> I would add that Beckett’s correspondence during the composition of *Comment c’est* shows that he was thinking of Canto 5, not Canto 7, though this does not necessarily invalidate the readings above. In consecutive letters written in November 1959, to Barbara Bray and to Jacob Schwartz, it is the second Circle of Hell he refers to, in which the punished are not the wrathful but adulterers – that is, in Smith’s terms, not those who are guilty of an excessive destructiveness of alterity, but those who are guilty of an excessive desire for it.<sup>18</sup> Their punishment is to be blown about eternally by capricious winds, an image that is borne out by the indifferent circulation of pseudo-erotic couples in the text. This detail will become salient to my argument later on (*LSB* 3, 250-2).

The narrator of *How It Is* has had many of his remaining faculties deleted, and this makes him seem like the subject of an experiment or a scientific model (‘I haven’t been given memories this time’ (*HII*, 3)). He is quoting out loud from an ‘ancient voice’ that is ‘in’ him but does not belong to him, like the Unnamable then, who is forced to speak on behalf of his ‘tormentors’.<sup>19</sup> On this occasion, however, the voice is ‘murmuring’ in ‘scraps’ of ‘past moments’ and ‘old dreams’ from a ‘life [...] above in the light’, rather than ‘stammering out’ a kind of ideological ‘lesson’ (*HII*, 3; *U*, 27). As the narrator slowly drags himself face down towards a companion, he wonders what if anything these ‘scraps’ and ‘images’ have to do with his ‘present formulation’. The voice might not be his, but the ‘other’ life it is communicating is at least ‘said to have been mine’, and certain aspects of it seem to be reflected in the narrator’s current predicament (*HII*, 3).

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<sup>17</sup> Russel Smith, ‘Bearing Witness in How It Is’, in M. Okamuro, N. Mori, B. Clement, S. Houppermans, A. Moorjani, A. Uhlmann (eds.), *Borderless Beckett / Beckett sans frontières, Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd’hui*, Editions Rodopi B.V., Amsterdam, p. 353.

<sup>18</sup> Beckett, *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, Vol. 3, 1957-1965, eds. George Craig, Martha Dow Fehsenfeld, Dan Gunn and Lois More Overbeck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 250-2.

<sup>19</sup> Beckett, *The Unnamable*, in *Three Novels*, e.g. p. 341.



Part two describes the narrator's life with 'Pim', which mainly consists of attacking him in the 'arse' with a tin-opener, until eventually he is abandoned by him (*HII*, 121). The narrator's attacks on Pim are part of a regimen of 'torment' that seems to be part erotic, part pedagogical, part aesthetic in nature (*HII*, 87). Pim is drilled to respond in particular ways ('sing', 'speak', 'stop', 'louder' 'softer', 'bravo', 'lousy', 'encore') to particular 'stimuli' ('nails in armpit', 'blade in arse', 'thump on skull', 'pestle on kidney', 'finger in anus', 'clap athwart arse') (*HII*, 89). The narrator uses the tin-opener on him because his voice is a form of sustenance providing 'more nourishment [...] than sardines can ever offer' (*HII*, 189). If the Unnamable was 'made of words', then Pim is eaten alive (*Un*, 379).

Laura Salisbury has suggested, in economic terms, that the Unnamable is driven by 'the desire to labour and bring the subject into the world, to speak of itself alone rather than its avatars'.<sup>20</sup> It does this by evacuating the words that 'contaminate the body into which they [have been] violently forced', or force-fed, by the text's 'college of tyrants' (Salisbury 2008, 176; *Un*, 304). Salisbury's argument is that Beckett's comedy often acts as a kind of reflex akin to gagging, both a bulimic rejection of everything on offer and a 'parodic mirroring of the fantasies of commodification and capitalist exchange' (Salisbury 2008, 177). While this may be true of the Three Novels, it is difficult to reconcile with the overt cannibalism of *How It Is*, a text in which everyone is eating or being eaten, and which finally devours itself.

The world of *How It Is* is divided into two realms, one 'above in the light' and the other 'below' in the mud (*HII*, 121). The narrator seems to be the mouthpiece of another torturer in the latter, implying an infinite regress ('and so on infinitely' (*HII*, 181)). Several 'little scene[s]' play out from the life above, mostly in childhood and domestic

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<sup>20</sup> Laura Salisbury, *Samuel Beckett: Laughing Matters, Comic Timing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), pp. 165.

settings (*HII*, 97). One of them seems to be conferred with a special significance, since it is emphatically repeated:

met Pam I think / love birth of love increase decrease death efforts to resuscitate  
through the arse joint vain through the cunt anew vain jumped from the window or  
fell broken column (*HII*, 111).

Pam Prim we made love every day then every third then the Saturday then just the  
odd time to get rid of it tried to revive it through the arse too late she fell from the  
window or jumped broken column (*HII*, 155)

This scene of hopeful anal eroticism or sadism from the life above ('wife above') seems to be the basis of the narrator's encounter with Pim (*HII*, 93, 97). Like Pim, whose name Pam/Prim nearly is, this individual is the narrator's counterpart in love or 'torment', and both are subject to his aggressive interest in their 'arse[s]' (*HII*, 43). The scene occurs twice in this recognisable setting of windows and cunts and Saturdays, and at least once in the life 'below' of alternating, ambiguously consensual sadomasochistic dyads (*HII*, 65).<sup>21</sup>

In Part three, Pim crawls away to find a victim and the narrator waits for a tormentor to arrive. Tormentor and victim swap places with every encounter, an unremitting Saturnalia, and the narrator wonders how many people there must be for this to be possible: at least four, but possibly countless others. A whole planet appears in the light of this hypothesis: 'billions' of creatures divided into transactional pairings in which one participant is the consumer, the other the producer of suffering (*HII*, 65). This 'infinite' conga-line of active and passive exchanges is one in which 'voice' is always being 'extorted' for the purposes of 'nourishment' (*HII*, 159, 189). The system in which it occurs is so 'exquisitely organised' that the narrator assumes there must be 'an intelligence a love' coordinating it, matchmaking so that no tormentor is left without a victim and vice versa, distributing sacks and sardines to put them on between human meals (*HII*, 181, 189). This 'orgy of false being' is something like a dating website with

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<sup>21</sup> Peter Boxall argues that *How It Is* is partly about 'S/M erotics'. The implication of my title is that it is not. Peter Boxall, 'Beckett and Homoeroticism', in Lois Oppenheim (ed.), *Samuel Beckett Studies: Palgrave Advances* (New York: Palgrave, 2004), p. 114.

100% efficiency, or the planned socialisation of cathexes, a frictionless, abstract world of loving extremity, a terrible parody of utopia. When looked at from afar, over time, it might almost be a single Borg-like entity, 'a vast imbrication of flesh without breach or fissure' (*HII*, 185). Its 'total life' is measured in 'united net sufferings', a GDP of horror; and aggregate unhappiness provides the imbrication with enough momentum to 'drag itself thus from west to east towards an inexistent peace', against the grain of terrestrial motion (*HII*, 171, 189). If everything was perfectly rationalised, the narrator thinks, it would be 'the same instant always everywhere': 'the same voice the same things nothing changing but the names', everyone 'eternally now Bom now Pim' (*HII*, 151). Eternity is the 'total permutability' of something like love or unmediated power, since we are everyone everywhere forever.<sup>22</sup> But if we are everyone then we might be anyone at all; in a final swerve the narrator spectacularly revokes everything he has described ('all balls yes'), only affirming that he is laid out like 'a cross' and that he will 'die' (*HII*, 191).

A number of critics have noted that the Algerian War might be an important context for *How It Is*. Anthony Uhlmann touches on this in his chapter on the '[c]risis with the moral order in post World War Two France' in *Beckett and Poststructuralism* (1999), though his focus is mainly on Vichy collaboration and Nazi torture.<sup>23</sup> In 'Torture, Text, Human Rights: Beckett's *Comment c'est* / *How It Is* and the Algerian War' (2016), Adam Piette provides a more detailed account of the torture crisis in relation to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, developing Uhlmann's point that 'torture in French colonial space' is a 'chronotopic and inverted replay of Gestapo terror' (Piette 2016, 151). Piette's conclusion is that *How It Is* 'bear[s] witness to the abuse of torture at the heart of the state of exception justified by the colonial clause [in the Declaration of Human Rights]' (Piette 2016, 152).

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<sup>22</sup> Beckett, *Murphy*, ed. J. C. C. Mays (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 2009), p. 57.

<sup>23</sup> Anthony Uhlmann, *Beckett and Poststructuralism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 91.

David Lloyd makes a similar reading to Piette in his chapter '[o]n Extorted Voice', though his approach is more theoretical than historical. Using Kant and Marx, Lloyd argues that *How It Is* discloses the "deep structure" of historical conditions' underpinning torture in the modern 'security state' (Lloyd 2010, 218). It does this by showing how legal equality is subtended by a 'logic of substitution' that is like a torturer's indifference to the suffering individual ('what the fuck [...] does it matter who suffers') (Lloyd 2010, 212; *HII*, 176). Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) provides the model of a 'split subject' in *How It Is*, half 'subject of reason' and half 'pathological subject' (Lloyd 2010, 216). The pathological subject is the 'subject that undergoes' things like 'needing, desiring, enjoying and suffering' (216). It is the object of unavailable 'laws of natural causality', and this makes it an opaque 'object to itself', too (Lloyd 2010, 209). For this reason it is unfree to produce universally applicable maxims, because it is ruled by laws amongst which it cannot orientate itself. This is why the 'subject of reason' has to be a 'subject without properties': its maxims cannot 'rise to the level of a moral law for all' unless it has been purged of all circumstance and particularity (Lloyd 2010, 209). When the 'sovereign' subject of reason has wrested itself from the empirical, 'pathological' subject that governs over it, it is free to speak with the voice of the categorical imperative, a universally legislating moral command. But as Lloyd points out that Lacan points out ('I say it as I hear it' (*HII*, 147)), the sovereign subject is not really issuing that command as a subject of freedom. If it has to be evacuated before the voice of the categorical imperative is heard, what is left for it to issue from? It is no more available to the subject of reason than the laws of natural causality were to the pathological subject. So the active-passive structure of the 'split subject' is referred back or up a level, with the moral law 'becom[ing] another inaccessible or supersensible thing-in-itself, even as its pronouncements, its utterances, become an object for the inner ear of the subject' (Lloyd 2010, 210). This is like torture because it is an 'alien' voice that 'issues from the unwilling subject' and is 'made to betray him' (Lloyd 2010, 210-11).

The ‘moment of universality’ that Kant finds once his subject has had its properties deleted is the ‘deep structure’ for formal equality before the law in liberal democracies. Kant’s moral law is like political equality before the law because they both answer to the ‘need to predicate on the multitude of contingent individuals a single and universal form for the moral law, without which ethics would be mired in the particularities of singular pleasures and pains’ (Lloyd 2010, 211). This is only possible if those particularities are ‘abstracted from’, leaving a merely ‘formal law’ intact that can be applied to all subjects as if they were ‘alike’. This “as if” is a ‘metaphor’ because it suspends differences to bring ‘disparate subjects’ together (Lloyd 2010, 212). Like a metaphor it works centrifugally to attract samenesses to the centre; it is premised on the potential equivalence of things (“this is that”), or what Lloyd calls ‘a logic of substitution’. This logic of substitution means that Kant’s ethics and the rule of law are both based on a ‘system of representation’, in which a ‘single figure’ is made to ‘stand for’ everyone in that aspect of themselves that is taken for ‘universality’, so that they can be subject to a universal law (Lloyd 2010, 212).

Lloyd is arguing that the series of replaceable torturer/victims in *How It Is* stands for the ‘inner logic’ of this world (Lloyd 2010, 211). Representation, he thinks, is an idealist short-cut that makes all subjects ‘alike’ in order, ostensibly, to ensure legal equality (Lloyd 2010, 212). But this hellish regime of fungibility is not as bad as it sounds, because the text

refuses to depart from the “pathological” world of the feeling subject who appears as an object for himself and an object for others whom he takes as his objects in an endless series of substitutions, ‘tormentor always of the same and victim always of the same’. In this respect, it registers the conditions of a world in which the determination that every subject is an end in himself and not a means for others is systematically traduced. (Lloyd 2010, 211; *HII*, 124)

*How It Is* is not a symptom but a ‘dark parody of the *Second Critique*’, because it uses torture figuratively to imagine the conditions of possibility for a world in which subjects constitute means for one another rather than ends (Lloyd 2010, 211). The figuratively tortured subject represents that new world because it is the opposite of the ‘dominant

ethical paradigm' which has us believe that there can be no equality of justice without Kant's subject of reason, the sovereign subject whose disinterestedness ends up being like a torturer's indifference. It is not as troubling as it might be to think of being tortured as a utopian sublime of generosity because '*How It Is* is not a representation of the world as it appears to be, but a demonstration of its inner logic' (Lloyd 2010, 211). Unlike Kantian ethics or the laws we live under, *How It Is* will not exclude the 'pathological' content that determines each subject 'in its particularity'. Being about the most extreme and impermissible things that a human being can do or suffer, it is exclusively about Kant's pathological subjectivity. This means that it blocks the symbolic move that would isolate the universal element in all subjects in order to make them formally alike. In other words it refuses 'ascent from particularity to representation', the 'metaphorical sublimation' of difference in 'a single' figure that 'leads' to the text's 'formal principle of intersecting seriality' (Lloyd 2010, 212). The seriality indicates the nature of the problem, and the theme of torture points the way to a kind of solution. The pathological subject is the only subject eligible for freedom because only it can go off reason's punitive 'script' and found a 'life in common' on what is really universal: 'the commonality of the needing, desiring, enjoying and suffering human life that the split subject and its complementary couple, torturer–tortured, subject–object, have subordinated under the category of the 'pathological' (HII, 77; Lloyd 2010, 216). However, the text also ethically prevents us from enjoying this fantasy of reconciliation too much ('if it is not too late to conceive of other worlds...' etc. (HII, 189)). *How It Is* shocks and disgusts us with our own premature utopianism, mimicking the argument against any such 'ethics mired in the particularities of singular pains and pleasures' (Lloyd 2010, 211). Its violence, shockingly paralleled by the historical fact of torture in Algeria (but crucially not symbolising it), helps to check irresponsibly utopian readings by providing an approximation of the resistance any such imaginary transformation of social relations would and does encounter in the real world (one of the readiest objections being, If there was no universal law, how would

you stop people from torturing each other all of the time?). This ethical failsafe requires a very delicate and artful balance. If the text tipped too much towards utopianism, it would entail a horrifically exploitative use of real historical suffering for dreamy political ends. If the text tipped too much away from utopianism, it would exploit the same suffering for indifferently aesthetic ends. To get the balance right, the distance from the real referent of torture must be calculated exactly, much like Beckett calculated the distance of *Endgame* (1956) from nuclear warfare.<sup>24</sup> Beckett's characteristic almost-formalism has been used, again, to put his work at the most productively ambiguous remove from a historical event, refusing to sugar-coat the horror or to let us off the hook, yet still leaving a grain of hope intact for those who want to find it, the only ethical quantity and a representative one at that.

The French government had been torturing people in Algeria since at least December 1951, though the war did not reciprocally begin until November 1954. Claude Bourdet's 1951 article for *L'Observateur*, 'Is there an Algerian Gestapo?', is considered to be the first account of police torture, predating the formation of the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) by three years.<sup>25</sup> Another article by Bourdet, who had himself been tortured by the Gestapo, appeared the same week in January 1955 as François Mauriac's 'The Question'; this was four months after the then 500-strong FLN launched their first attacks on targets across Algeria, and two months before the Algerian governor general, Jacques Soustelle, received the first official report of torture by French paratroopers (Shepard 2006, 69-70). *Le Monde*, the centre-right daily founded at the behest of Charles de Gaulle, published an opinion piece invoking Nazi concentration camps in April 1956, bringing the news to a mainstream reactionary audience for the first time. In February 1957, a left-ish Catholic weekly named

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<sup>24</sup> Adorno's analysis of this in *Aesthetic Theory* (1970) was discussed in the introduction. Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, eds. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 399.

<sup>25</sup> Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonisation: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (London: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 66.

*Témoignage Chrétien* printed a collection of letters by an army reservist stationed in Algeria, the first of several first-person accounts from recalled soldiers to be published by Christian organisations that year. Jean-Paul Sartre was moved by one such collection, *Des Rappelés Témoignent*, to write an admiring article in the May 1957 edition of *Les Temps Modernes*, flirtatiously called ‘You’re Wonderful’ (Shepard 2006, 66). This was one of three pieces on torture Sartre penned from April 1956 to 1958, including ‘A Victory’, published in the *L’Express* in April 1958, which would become the Preface to Henri Alleg’s *The Question* (1958). This was the first of seven subjective accounts of torture published by Jérôme Lindon’s Les Éditions de Minuit, Beckett’s publisher, over the next four years, all of which were banned by the French government.<sup>26</sup>

The last of these accounts, *Djamila Boupacha* (1962), tends to receive less attention now than the others, perhaps because it has been overshadowed by a gendered history of the conflict which sees ‘torture as a heroic trial of masculinity’.<sup>27</sup> At the time, however, Boupacha’s case received a vast amount of press, more than *The Question* (1958), though it is Alleg’s text that has become the touchstone for critics and historians. Boupacha’s notoriety is consistent with the fact that ‘[t]he most publicised combatants of the FLN were women’ during the war.<sup>28</sup> Graphic accounts of tortured women FLN fighters were common in the French press, something that Christine Quinan attributes to prurience and racism. For example, Quinan points out that much of the public discussion about Boupacha focused unnervingly on her chastity and innocence.<sup>29</sup> Picasso made a sketch of her, wide-eyed with imputed ‘purity’, helpfully

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<sup>26</sup> Thankfully this had little effect on samizdat circulation. James D. Le Sueur, *Uncivil War: Intellectuals and Identity Politics During the Decolonization of Algeria*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), p. 178-9.

<sup>27</sup> Judith Surkis, ‘Ethics and Violence: Simone de Beauvoir, Djamila Boupacha, and the Algerian War’, ed. Susan Rubin, *French Politics, Culture, and Society*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (2010), p. 46.

<sup>28</sup> Guity Nashat and Judith E. Tucker, *Women in the Middle East and North Africa: Restoring Women to History* (Indianapolis, In: Indiana University Press, 1998), p. 111.

<sup>29</sup> Christine Quinan, ‘Uses and Abuses of Gender and Nationality: Torture and the French-Algerian War’, in Sandra Ponzanesi (ed.), *Gender, Globalization, and Violence: Postcolonial Conflict Zones* (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 117.



bringing out the ‘fetishisation of virginity’ that de Beauvoir had condemned in *The Second Sex* (1949) (Surkis 2002, 44). Judith Surkis argues that de Beauvoir pragmatically ‘mobilised’ the ‘figure’ of the innocent virgin in her campaign for Boupacha’s freedom, despite her opposition to sexist stereotypes (Surkis 2002, 44). This is disputable. Although Gisèle Halimi notes that de Beauvoir rejected ‘any emotional approach to the problem’ of Boupacha’s incarceration and of the Algerian War in general, it is not necessarily the case that making reference to Boupacha’s virginity constituted a cynical public relations manoeuvre, as Quinan points out (Quinan 2014, 119). For Boupacha, virginity was ‘a totemic symbol, with positively magical significance’, Halimi writes; it would have been negligent at best to omit this information from the account, and at worst tendentiously Westernising. It is hardly likely that De Beauvoir was less aware than her co-author about this culturally sensitive subject.

De Beauvoir wrote up Boupacha’s experience in an article in *Le Monde*, published on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June 1961, three days before Beckett finished *Comment c’est* (‘Fin 6.6.60’, the sixth and final typescript reads, with knowing hellishness).<sup>30</sup> It succeeded where much journalism had not, in ‘provok[ing] a scandal in French and international opinion’.<sup>31</sup> The article describes how Boupacha was tortured with electric shocks, a form of waterboarding known as *la baignoire*, being forced to drink foul water, rape with intermediate objects including a toothbrush and a beer bottle, cigarette burns, stress positions (known collectively as *la corde*), and having water pumped into her mouth and anus.<sup>32</sup> Her testimony is representative of the experience of many survivors.

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<sup>30</sup> Beckett, ‘Pim’ Notebook 6, Series I, Box 1, Folder 11, Samuel Beckett Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, p. 477.

<sup>31</sup> Natalya Vince, *Our Fighting Sisters: Nation, Memory and Gender in Algeria, 1954-2012* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), p. 84.

<sup>32</sup> James D. Le Sueur, ‘Torture and Decolonization of French Algeria: Nationalism, “Race” and Violence during Colonial Incarceration’, in Graeme Harper (ed.), *Colonial and Post-Colonial Incarceration* (London: Bloomsbury, 2001), p. 169.

Raphaëlle Branche notes that '[v]iolent penetration, often using a piece of wood, a bottle etc., was frequent' throughout the Algerian War.<sup>33</sup>

Boupacha's case was unusual in that, unlike the many 'other newspaper accounts of anonymous tortured women [that] were circulating', she wanted the details of her ordeal to be disseminated as widely as possible (Quinan 2014, 120). After 7 years of conflict and crisis, public resistance to the war was at a worryingly low ebb, and Boupacha wanted to shock the French public into caring about Algeria again. Her lawyer, Gisèle Halimi, describes their mutual frustration in *Djamila Boupacha: The Story of the Torture of a Young Algerian Girl Which Shocked Liberal French Opinion* (1962):

The words were the same stale clichés: ever since torture had been used in Algeria there had always been the same words, the same expressions of indignation, the same, the same signatures to public protests, the same promises. This automatic routine had not abolished one set of electrodes or water-hoses; nor had it in any remotely effective way curbed the power of those who used them. (De Beauvoir and Halimi 1962, 19)

For Halimi, activist literature had been ineffective because of its docile, often self-regarding conformity to a rhetoric of 'indignation' that was practically official. What this looks like is the 'same[ness]' of 'words': an unthinking repetitiousness that is performed by her text through its 'automatic' repetition of that word. The list of forms of verbal protest, 'words', expressions', 'signatures', 'promises', are formed into a diminuendo, hushed up on the sibilance of 'promises', the only word that points towards action. We are made to feel the 'remote[ness]' of these words from any praxis by their contrast with the stark materiality of the two objects of torture, picked at random and unanswerably strewn about in a sentence that nearly equates the 'automatic routine' of dissent with the repetitive procedures of torture itself. The 'same[ness]' of language, diminishing returns of meaning on a given form as it loses its symbolic power, is being linked to the 'power' of the torturers. In Halimi's dialectical

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<sup>33</sup> Raphaëlle Branche, 'Sexual Violence in the Algerian War', in Dagmar Herzog, *Brutality and Desire* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 250.

judgement, they were being allowed to continue to brutalise their victims with impunity because of a congenial discursive environment.

A good example is François Mauriac's January 1955 article 'The Question'. Adam Piette notes that the piece takes the form of a conversation with an Algerian missionary, but it is also a kind of inverted confession, with the missionary's guilt infecting his lay confessor: Mauriac says he feels complicit 'in a crime' that he has 'unwittingly taken part in' and 'now hesitates to turn himself in' (Piette 2016, 157). The impulse to cover-up torture on the behalf of one's country suggests a degree of identification that is surely more like empathy with the perpetrators than an ethical awareness of national complicity. This puts him in the aesthetically pleasing position of someone who is also being coerced to disclose information. Mauriac, a Noble Prize winner who applauded Beckett for thinking that 'words all say the same thing', is fantasising – not unlike Beckett in *How It Is* – about playing both torturer and victim.<sup>34</sup>

As I have mentioned, Adam Piette identifies Jean-Paul Sartre's 'Colonialism is a System' (1956) as the probable 'trigger' for *How It Is* (Piette 2016, 158). In that essay, Sartre argues that the post-war renaissance of the discourse of rights was a liberal reaction to fascism that could not be sustained in peacetime in a colonial power. 'One of the functions of racism', Sartre says, 'is to compensate the latent universalism of bourgeois liberalism: since all human beings have the same rights, the Algerian will be made a subhuman'.<sup>35</sup> France's overstretched "universalism" snapped back into place as soon as an otherable group declined to cooperate with its geopolitical aims, leading to the exclusion of Algerian citizens from the category of the human ('since the natives are

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<sup>34</sup> François Mauriac, 'The Question', in *François Mauriac on Race, War, Politics and Religion*, trans. Nathan Bracher (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press), p. 182. Mauriac, *The New Literature*, trans. Samuel I. Stone (New York: George Brazier Inc., 1959), p. 12.

<sup>35</sup> I have replaced Piette's faithfully gendered translation, which renders 'human beings' as 'men' and 'subhuman' as 'sub-man', because the Algerian fighters and citizens considered in this chapter are not men. Sartre's terms, '*l'homme*' and '*sous-homme*', are characteristic of his tendentious masculinisation of revolutionary discourse. Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Colonialism is a System', in *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, trans. Steve Brewer, Azzedine Haddour and Terry McWilliams (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 45.

subhuman the Declaration of the Human Rights does not apply to them' (Sartre 2001, 50)). Piette's argument about Beckett is that he was also 'concerned with the definition of a man' in relation to torture, and that 'Sartre's influence is visible [...] in the phenomenology of the interaction between the narrator and Pim' (Piette 2016, 158). The interaction consists of a sudden apprehension, dimly perceived through 'the command and control structure of the torturing', of a 'more human forum [...] based on species recognition and acknowledgement': an accidental 'handshake' that occurs in the melee of body-parts and gestures (Piette 2016, 50). Piette thinks of this as a dialectical 'role reversal', with Pim reasserting the 'rights' he has only legally been deprived of, forcing the narrator to become the subordinate party, since the 'voice' he is 'extort[ing]' from Pim is the voice his role as torturer is defined by lacking (Piette 2016, 166). Piette concludes that '[t]he narrator's life is actually Pim's story'; but 'as a counter-interrogation concerning the narrator's own existential dependence on [Pim's] voice', it is a story that redemptively contains the seeds of its dialectical undoing (Piette 2016, 166).

Piette notes that the narrator's dependence on Pim 'turns the narrator-narrated relationship upside down and inside out in ways that mimic the inversion of victim and torturer' in another essay by Sartre (Piette 2016, 166). 'If fifteen years are enough to turn the victims into executioners', he writes in 'The Victory', 'it is because circumstances alone dictate' (Sartre 2001, 76). Sartre sees this as a phenomenological opportunity for revolutionary subjectivity in the way described above. However, in his attempt to counteract a deterministic Althusserian view of historical agents as *How It Is*-like 'personif[ications]' of their 'functions' in the economic system, he ends up providing a no less reifying vision of abstract dialectical forces, albeit one that plays out in the reassuringly available realm of heroic existential subjectivity.<sup>36</sup> Sartre appears to regard the roles that history assigns to torturers and victims as a matter of sheer

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<sup>36</sup> Louis Althusser et. al., *Reading Capital*, trans. B. Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1970), p. 199.

chance. If ‘anyone, any time, can become either victim or perpetrator’, then the buck stops with those who do not properly exercise their freedom to intervene in contingency (Sartre 2001, 76). This is a worryingly relativistic account, to say the least, of the historical forces that put power into the hands of the French colonial authorities in the first place. *How It Is*, which also seems to suggest that distributions of power and suffering are arbitrary, follows the thought through to its ethical conclusion. If tormentors and victims can dialectically switch places in an ensemble of relations that is choreographed to ensure a perfect equality of suffering, then ‘what the fuck [...] does it matter who suffers’ (*HII*, 65, 176)?

Both Beckett and Sartre seem to see torture as an exclusively masculine exercise. There are no women in the life ‘below’ in *How It Is*, a detail that has occasionally been interpreted as being indicative of a kind of queerness, or a hint to read the text in terms of consensual sadomasochism as well as torture (*HII*, 121). For example, Peter Boxall’s essay on ‘Beckett and Homoeroticism’ (2011) argues that the homoerotic content of Beckett’s writing, especially with regard to his exclusively male ‘pseudocouple[s]’, has been missed because of its obviousness’ (*Un*, 291).<sup>37</sup> Taking his cue from Boxall, Paul Stewart discusses *How It Is* in terms of consensual sadomasochism, and concludes that it is ‘closer in spirit to Leo Bersani’s opposition to [Foucault’s playful optimism with regards S/M]’ than it is to Foucault.<sup>38</sup> While Foucault believes that consensual sadomasochism is not a ‘reproduction’ of structural violence but an affirming and empowering parody of it (it is ‘an acting out of power structures’), Bersani believes that the relief of ‘acting out’ is only enjoyable because it ‘lifts a social repression on laying bare the reality behind the subterfuges’.<sup>39</sup> ‘[I]n its open embrace of the [social and economic] structures themselves and its undisguised appetite for the ecstasy they

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<sup>37</sup> Boxall, ‘Beckett and Homoeroticism’, pp. 114–5.

<sup>38</sup> Paul Stewart, *Sex and Aesthetics* (New York: Palgrave, 2011), p. 127.

<sup>39</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘Michel Foucault: Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity’, interview with Bob Gallagher and Alexander Wilson, *The Advocate*, No. 400 (1984), p. 30. Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 97.

promise', Bersani concludes, 'it is fully complicit with a culture of death': that is, with the nihilism of structural violence and political torture (Bersani 1995, 97).

For Sartre, political torture is the supreme expression of the Hegelian drive to be recognised as human, which means to be recognised as men. As Sartre writes in his 'Preface' to Alleg's *The Question*:

in the case of torture, this strange contest of will, [...] the torturer pits himself against the tortured for his "manhood" and the duel is fought as if it were not possible for both sides to belong to the human race.<sup>40</sup>

Judith Surkis has observed that French intellectuals generally philosophised about torture in Algeria in unrepresentatively masculine way, given that France tortured numerous FLN women. 'Sartre's characteristic macho bravado', she writes, 'amplified one dimension of [Alleg's] *The Question*, namely its account of torture as a heroic trial of masculinity' (Surkis 2010, 45-6). 'When the victim wins,' Sartre writes competitively, 'then it is goodbye to their absolute power, their lordship' (Sartre 2001, 88).<sup>41</sup> For Sartre, Alleg's endurance is a dialectical event, a qualitative shift in the power structure of the Spirit. The master has been forced to recognise the slave, and what is being recognised is his 'virility':

[t]his heroic masculinity thus stands in opposition to the diminished masculinity of his torturers, who Sartre describes as 'these little cads, proud of their strength, their youth, their number.' By contrast, wrote Sartre, 'Alleg is the really tough one, the only one who is really strong'. (Surkis 2010, 41)

One of the toughest FLN fighters to be captured during the Algerian War was called Djamila Bouhired. Bouhired was arrested on the 9th of April 1957 for planting a bomb in a milk bar in September 1956. She was tortured and sentenced to death, provoking an international outcry; the British Labour Party and Bertrand Russell were among

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<sup>40</sup> Sartre, 'Preface', in Henri Alleg, *The Question*, trans. John Calder (London: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), p. xxxix.

<sup>41</sup> Alleg himself said he felt that it was 'almost indecent to talk about oneself', let alone to talk about Hegel, in the context of systemic torture (Alleg 2006, 33).

those to call for amnesty.<sup>42</sup> *For Djamila Bouhired* (1957), a book published by Lindon's Minuit and written by her lawyer, Jacques Vergès, and George Arnaud, graphically detailed the torture she underwent.<sup>43</sup> Bouhired's fellow accused, Djamila Bouazza, Baya Hocine and Zohra Drif, suffered the same treatment. The dramatic events of their court hearing, dubbed the 'Bomb Trial' by a titillated media, were headline news for a full month in 1957. Hélène Cixous remembers it vividly in an open letter she wrote to Drif in 2003, describing how inspiring their story had been for her as a student in Paris.<sup>44</sup> Bouhired was so famous and admired she had a popular film made about her in 1958, *Djamila, The Algerian*; she is also a starring figure in *The Battle of Algiers* (1966). The right-wing press were so worried about this perceived glamorisation of terrorism that they tried to tarnish her reputation by spreading rumours that she fell in love with her torturer, a tactic that was used again on at least two other anonymous FLN fighters.<sup>45</sup> Bouhired's name was 'a household word', as one historian puts it, 'for anyone concerned with the Algerian revolution'. Beckett, who wrote to his then-lover Barbara Bray that his '[e]ars [were] glued to Europe no 1' throughout the siege of Algiers (*LSB* 3, 290), was certainly among the concerned.

In his essay on *How It Is*, Piette describes how a de facto 'Colonial Clause' allowed the French government to contravene the stipulation in Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) that '[n]o one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment' (Piette 2016, 152). The clause Piette identifies is Article 63. It permits '[a]ny state' to declare 'that the present Convention shall extend to all or any of the territories for whose international relations it is responsible', implying that the Convention does not already extend to this euphemism

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<sup>42</sup> Alexander Mikaberidze, *Atrocities, Massacres, and War Crimes: An Encyclopaedia*, Vol I (Oxford: ABC-CLIO, 2013), p. 72.

<sup>43</sup> *For Djamila Bouhired* describes how Bouhired was waterboarded, branded with cigarettes and had 'electrodes [placed] in her vagina' (Vince 2015, 84).

<sup>44</sup> Hélène Cixous, 'Letter to Zohra Drif', trans. Eric Prenowitz, *College Literature*, 'Algeria', Vol. 30, No. 1 (2003), pp. 82-90.

<sup>45</sup> Darius Rejali, *Torture and Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 490.

for occupied countries. While the British government used this defence to torture its colonised subjects in Northern Ireland and Cyprus, there is no evidence to show that the French government did so too. They instead relied on a vanishingly significant distinction between prisoners of war, or POW, and what they called ‘*pris les armes à la main*’, or PAM. This legal debacle was widely publicised, with ‘*pris les armes à la main*’ appearing in 45 separate articles in *Le Monde* during the War.<sup>46</sup> The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which inspected “detention centres” in Algeria in November 1956 and July 1957, pressed the French government to recognise captured FLN fighters as prisoners of war who were therefore protected under Article 3 of the ECHR. But on March 13 1958, General Salan confirmed French policy in a memorandum to *l’Armée de terre*, writing that ‘[i]t is well settled that the detained must not be considered prisoners of war. The Geneva Conventions are not applicable to them’.<sup>47</sup>

Ruby Cohn points out that the name ‘Pim’, which was the name of *How It Is* from the first notebook until its completion, ‘puns in French on *pain* or bread, the so-called staff of life’, because the “i” would be pronounced in French as an “a”.<sup>48</sup> Pim is confused or elided with ‘Pam’ on three occasions in the text, all of them pertaining to a relationship the narrator has had in his ‘life above’ (*HII*, 93). Cohn thinks of ‘Pam Prim’ as distinct characters, which they might be, though if she is right then the two figures have so much in common that the meaning of the distinction must be that it is almost immaterial (*HII*, 155). On one occasion they are named ‘Pam’ without the alibi of a pun or slip, and it is unclear to which “Pam” this Pam belongs. Krim and Kram are a parallel case, making it less convincing to attribute the slip to indifferent wordplay (*HII*, 111).

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<sup>46</sup> E.g. ‘À Constantine, le tribunal militaire a condamné à mort un rebelle pris les armes à la main (PAM) en juin dernier.’ [“In Constantine, a military tribunal sentenced a PAM rebel captured last June”.] Marchel Thiebault, ‘Two Grenades Explode in the Casbah – One Dead and Five Injured’, 5 November 1957, *Le Monde Archives*, Web, 14 April 2017.

<sup>47</sup> Memorandum from Salan to *l’Armée de terre*, March 13, 1958, quoted in Katherine Draper, ‘Why a War Without a Name May Need One: Policy-Based Application of International Humanitarian Law in the Algerian War’, *Texas International Law Journal*, Vol. 48, Issue 3 (2013), p. 596.

<sup>48</sup> Ruby Cohn, *A Beckett Canon* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2004), p. 257.



(Belkacem Krim, incidentally, was the name of the only surviving member of the founders of the FLN and its de facto leader from 1959; he signed the Evian Accords on behalf of Algeria in 1962.<sup>49</sup>) In the life 'below', Pim is assaulted in 'the arse' with a 'tin-opener' to make him speak or scream or sing on the narrator's behalf before the relationship, such as it is, is abandoned (*HII*, 85). In life above, the Pim-Pam figure has attempted suicide after a 'little scene' of hopeful anal eroticism or sadism fails to 'resuscitate' a relationship that has become sexually less interesting (*HII*, 93, 111). Both Pams have therefore been on the wrong end of disconcertingly focussed attempts to form or salvage romantic relationships 'through the arse', as Beckett flippantly puts it, with the difference that one has been sexually assaulted, in a context somewhat like torture, with a domestic object. The name "Pam", as well as being a government euphemism for people eligible for torture, is a name with personal connotations for Beckett. Pamela Mitchell, with whom Beckett had an affair from 1954 to 1956, inspired the dyadic structure of *How It Is*, in which one person is assigned the role of sadist, the other of masochist: '[d]o not get silly ideas into yr [sic] head about hurting. It is I the hurter of the two' (*LSB* 2, 492). Tellingly, the syntax of this expression echoes the beginning of *Molloy*, when the eponymous hero triumphs over his mother and her homophonic maternal room: '[i]t is I who live there now' (*Mo*, 3). It is not immaterial whether or not Beckett intended the term PAM to be identified with Pamela Mitchell; it is enough that it could be understood in this way. Beckett allowed the identification to appear in a text that Mitchell would almost certainly read. That is an extraordinary act of violence to an ex-partner, doubling the thematic violence to which her phonic namesake is subjected. "Pam" is broken into, screwed open like Pim is with the tin-opener, her contents ("a") scooped out and replaced with a phallic "i", the orthographical equivalent of projective identification: '[i]t is I who live there now'.

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<sup>49</sup> Martin Evans, *Algeria: France's Undeclared War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 248.

The two most prominent reviewers of *How It Is* were signatories to Lindon's *Manifesto of the 121* (1960), an open letter to the French government opposing torture in Algeria and calling for the country to be given independence from colonial rule.<sup>50</sup> Jean-Jacques Mayoux was a 'great friend of Beckett's' and a fellow member of the Resistance.<sup>51</sup> He published his review, which pauses to describe 'a tool of torture [torture], to be stuck in Pim's arse', two weeks after de Beauvoir highlighted the 'frequent' French military practice of rape with intermediary objects, including household implements, in her *Le Monde* article about Djamila Boupacha (Mayoux 1979, 260).<sup>52</sup> Maurice Nadeau's review was published on the 26<sup>th</sup> of January 1961 in *L'Express*, the left-wing weekly magazine that first broke the news of torture in January 1955. Nadeau describes the story of a 'torturer who forms an amorous couple with his victim', a description that is not consistent with the text. The words 'victim' and 'tormentor' ('bourreau') do not appear in *How It Is* until a third of the way through Part three, long after the 'amorous' element of the relationship has been suggested; it seems likely that he had in mind the propaganda about female FLN combatants falling in love with their torturers.<sup>53</sup> Nadeau also emphasises the problem of external referents in the text, asking '[a]re we in the realm of literature? [a]re we outside of it?', with the provocative implication that it may not just be a literary fiction (Nadeau 1979, 229). The text does not appear to be here:

drive it into the arse not the hole not such a fool the cheek a cheek (*HII*, 85)

when stabbed in the arse instead of crying he sings his song what a cunt this Pim (*HII*, 85)

no feel merely slow and the day comes we come to the day when stabbed in the arse now an open wound instead of the cry a brief murmur done it at last (*HII*, 87)

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<sup>50</sup> Beckett himself did not add his name because he was concerned that the government would rescind his visa (*LSB* 2, 360).

<sup>51</sup> Jean-Jacques Mayoux, 'Review of *How It Is*', in Raymond Federman and Lawrence Graver (eds.), *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1979), p. 260.

<sup>52</sup> Branche, 'Sexual Violence in the Algerian War', p. 250. Beckett is careful never to use the word "torture" or "supplice" in *Comment c'est*; it is always 'bourreau', "executioner" (*HII*, e.g. 154). He does, however, seemingly by accident, once use the word 'tortures'/'tortured', but only in the notes for the English translation (*HII*, 707). The corresponding page in the French notes has 'bourreau', "executioner" (*HII*, 515).

<sup>53</sup> Maurice Nadeau, 'Review of *How It Is*', in *The Critical Heritage*, p. 227.

2 speak blade in arse [...] 5 softer index in anus (*HII*, 89)

stab him simply in the arse that is so to speak and he will say anything what he can whereas proof I need proof so stab him in a certain way signifying answer once and for all which I do (*HII*, 91)

the threat the bleeding arse the cracking nerves you invent but real (*HII*, 93)

Why would it be foolish, in the first quotation, to drive the opener into the hole rather than the cheek? I do not think this is a facetious gag about how the narrator is hypocritical to be comfortable with torture but squeamish about excrement. The historical reason it would be foolish is because one act is rape and the other might lawfully not be. Another of the legal tricks used to circumvent Article 63 of the European Convention of Human Rights involved ensuring that the victim's body did bear any visible wounds. This is one of the reasons rape was used by French paratroopers. General Massu called it 'functional torture', because it was supposed to be akin to 'the medical interventions of a surgeon or a dentist'.<sup>54</sup> The narrator's litigious pedantry about avoiding 'the hole', in a context of organised violence, parallels French Army policy about not leaving visible damage to the body during torture. Like Massu, the narrator thinks he is being smart by circumventing the legal definition of a far graver crime. The preferred assault in this instance does, however, do external bodily damage. By avoiding 'the hole', the narrator inverts and confuses the legal distinction between rape and torture that the French state exploited to do both.

As the torture proceeds, that distinction becomes even more obviously senseless. In the second quotation, Pim is a 'cunt' for being stabbed in the 'arse'. This is a gendered word that points towards a gendered context. Beckett's half-hearted transposition from women to men, the shallowest possible displacement, as Molloy likes to remind us, is

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<sup>54</sup> General Massu, quoted in Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, Ma: MIT Press, 1995), p. 118. Ross quotes historian Pierre Vidal-Naquet: 'Before and after the Algerian War, torturers boasted about employing a clean torture, one that didn't leave any traces, and, to the extent that there was "progress" in the techniques of repression, it's obviously there that it took place: the use of electricity leaves fewer traces than pulling out a tooth or a fingernail' (Ross 1995, 113).

reverting to its original ('[a] matter of complete indifference to me' (*Mo*, 52)). This reversion aims to point out the feebleness of its own equivocation, while at the same time likening that equivocation to the legalistic alibis used by the French state to justify torture against PAMs. In the third quotation, the 'arse' has become an 'open wound', a new orifice that makes the careful legalistic avoidance of penetration redundant. In the fourth quotation, it turns out the torturer's repertoire includes digital rape anyway. In the fifth quotation, the narrator's technique for stabbing Pim in the arse has been altered in a 'certain way', a tacit admission that the distinction between torture and rape has been chucked out. In the sixth quotation, the distinction between internal and external injuries has been irrevocably confused too: it is immaterial where an injury has been inflicted if visible 'bleeding' occurs, so the state's workaround has failed. The narrator is right to say that this image is 'invent[ed]' but 'real': it is how Djamilia Boupacha was described after she was tortured, left in 'a pool of her own blood' (De Beauvoir and Halimi 1962, 43-4).

David Lloyd made the case that '*How It Is* is not a representation of the world as it appears to be, but a demonstration of its inner logic' (Lloyd 2010, 211). Its inner logic blocks the symbolic move that would isolate the universal element in all subjects in order to make them formally alike, and in doing so it refuses the ascent from particularity to representation per se. This refusal stops it from being an egregious thematisation of real historical suffering, and even allows torture to become a qualifiedly utopian image, standing for a more generous form of relationality, made up of subjects who appear as objects for themselves and for others, rather than ends in themselves, amazingly with no obvious pun intended. The text involves violence as a limit case for this utopian proposition, indicating how far we are from it, but also emphasising the dangers of premature reconciliation. The historical fact of torture plays a part here, insofar as it might sober up incontinent dreamers, but its distance from that referent is calculated exactly, to avoid the kind of representation that it is critiquing as the inner logic that brings about state violence in the first place.

This is the aesthetic paradigm that Beckett knew his audience, who were made up of people also writing about torture, would be expecting when they read *Comment c'est*. But the inclusion of the name “Pim/Pam” unbalances a careful economy of inner logics and dim referents, slamming them into historical particularity in a way that Beckett’s texts had never done before. He is mapping a scene of romantic sadness from his ‘life above’ onto state torture and, I am suggesting, specifically the torture of FLN women. It is hard to resist the conclusion that the real ‘trigger’ of *How It Is*, which was called ‘Pim’ from the beginning of its composition in 1958 right up to its publication in 1961, was the simple homonym of PAM, ‘*pris les armes à la main*’, and Pam, Pamela Mitchell, about whom he felt, like the narrator of the text, that he was ‘the hurter of the two’.<sup>55</sup> *How It Is* not only does not refuse ‘metaphorical sublimation and the ascent from particularity to representation’; in one horrifying respect it makes that ascent all too easy: tortured revolutionary women are made to stand for Beckett’s ex and vice versa. And if that substitution was not egregious enough, this one incident of romantic disappointment or cruelty is made to stand for *all* romantic travails as the text pans out to ‘billions of us’, then all relationships characterised by a power imbalance (‘pedant dunce’ etc. (*HII*, 185)), then all situations in which people hurt one other, perhaps even including literal torture. The pathological world of the feeling subject is not a world that refuses the ascent from particularity to representation, *pace* Lloyd. Its ‘intersecting seriality’ is not the gift of the refusal of metaphorical generalisations, a utopian moment where the ‘total permutability’ of cathexes get to dance their ‘radiant measure’ (*Mu*, 62). It is a consequence of *not* refusing the metaphorical sublimation that would group all power imbalances together in the single figure of the tormentor and victim, leniently made reversible so that ‘what the fuck [...] does it matter who suffers’ can stop ‘waver[ing]’ and become a safely rhetorical question (*HII*, 173).

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<sup>55</sup> Beckett abruptly ended the relationship with Mitchell in September 1956, writing pitifully: ‘I don’t want you to forget me, but I think it would be the best thing for you. I’m over, as sure as if they were on their way to measure me for the box’ (*LSB* 2, 658). He fell in love with Barbara Bray not long after.

Jessica Benjamin's analysis of gendered social violence is a model of what occurs in *How It Is*. Parts one and two suggest that subjectivity ('voice') is constituted at the local level by destructive phantasy (anal and oral sadism). But what happens, it then asks, panning out from tormentor-victim dyad at the end of Part two, happens if that phantasy is real-ised as a universal law? This is where the text's orality, its emphasis on the subjective categories 'voice' and 'nourishment', converges with Lloyd's 'logic of substitution' (*III*, 189). If the other does not *impassively* survive our sadism, we will never discover where we end and the world begins. If we never become bounded subjects – which for Lloyd means *speaking* subjects, Lacan's 'subjects of enunciation' – we will be condemned to make the other speak of us, to 'extort' voice from them, in lieu of a negotiated subject-object relation, or Reality (*III*, 121).<sup>56</sup> But when the other is not a real other, when they are only an empty vessel and an instrument of our will, we can hardly hope to find our missing subjectivity in them. So we will be condemned to repeat our original failure indefinitely, destroying every new other in the attempt to encounter them, tearing through an endless series of disposable pseudo-objects as their torturers and their victims as the case may be. But it is not so much that torture and circulation are symbolised or sublimated in metaphors, if they are only that, of torture and cannibalism. *How It Is*, with its eponymous demand to be read as a literal statement of fact, sees such sadism as the basis of exploitative circulation, the logic of substitution. It is not, in other words, concerned with psychoanalysis's account of sadism as the phantasmatic component of healthy object relations, but with fulfilled destructive phantasy as a universal law of reality. It describes a world in which such phantasies are the fundamental principle of a social or socially allegorised existence, in which attacking the other and failing to encounter one's limits is the accepted goal of every human interaction. It represents the dumbfounding consequences this failure has on the faculty of self-representation, of utterance itself, which everyone is forced to seek

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<sup>56</sup> Jacques Lacan, 'Kant with Sade', trans. James B. Swenson Jr., in *October*, Vol. 51 (Winter, 1989 [1963]), p. 59.

outside themselves in hopeless projects of mastery. It asks what happens to the categories of the metaphoric and the literal, the sublimated and the unsublimated, in such unmediated pre-Oedipal, pre-symbolic, pre-linguistic conditions. It enquires how, under such conditions, we can hope to discriminate between the structural violence of, say, the capital relation ('our united net sufferings' (*HII*, 189)) or patriarchy ('met Pam I think [...] efforts to resuscitate through the arse [...] the cunt anew vain jumped from the window' (*HII*, 111)), and targeted bodily violence like that of French state-sanctioned torture in Algeria. Finally it frames these questions in an ethical twilight, asking 'what the fuck' complicity in violence means when it is universal, as it is in the case of both structural violence and state-mandated torture (*HII*, 176). If domination is intercalated through social existence in a way that undoes our capacity to make distinctions, it ultimately asks, how can anyone object to torture when they participate in normalised forms of violence every day?

This text ends up being about whether or not it is possible to pan out from personal circumstances to political structures, or to what extent personal circumstances shape or are shaped by those structures. Are the same power dynamics at work in individual relationships that are at work in historical struggles? (Yes, insofar as historical struggles are mediated by numberless individual relationships, and that everyone in them is an individual with relationships that shape those struggles to some extent, but this is not what *How It Is* seems to mean.) Is the narrator symbolically torturing Pim, and if so, what relationship does that symbol have to real historical torture? Is every degree of domination in personal relationships qualitatively the same thing as political domination? Does being toxically patriarchal, for instance, participate in the same power structures as organised sexual violence in the context of imperialism, as *How It Is* seems to suggest? (I have not been able to consider the no less important aspect of race in this chapter, but Frantz Fanon, whose *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) is about this subject in the same context, would say that power behaves the same way in every situation of oppression, whether it is individual or historical, patriarchal or racist

or classist.) Would that thought horrify or console people who are toxically patriarchal? Does it let torturers off the hook by making their violence apiece with hurting people emotionally, or does it make people like Beckett and Sartre more uncomfortably complicit with power all the way up? Could it, in a perverse sense, romanticise ordinary everyday social violence by making it a tragically universal characteristic of human life, with torture being a *hyperbole* rather than a symbol for it? Or does the text alert us to that possibility, in the context of the ‘war with no name’, by being both flagrantly explicit with names and disorientating inexplicit with content, or what I have called symbolic overdetermination? Does the thin integument of safe words holding back real torture from its everyday simulacra scare us, or is it only there to take the edge off things through phantasmatic mastery, the mild narcosis of representation potentiated by its closeness to the real thing, like a theme park ride? Could *How It Is* be pointing to the innocuousness of representation, of words, to show us how remote they are from praxis, even when they have been supercharged with personal and historical meaning, as in PAM? Does the text suggest that words will always be too safe, irrespective of what happens in the economy of language, from Hemingway’s “theory of omission” to the compulsive explicitation of tendentious “freedom of speech” activists, whom Beckett sometimes disconcertingly resembles? Does it tell us to be more conscientious word-users, to painstakingly discriminate between all forms of violence, so that the qualitative/quantitative problem doesn’t obtain? Is it positing a ‘nominalist ethics’, that demands we see all suffering as absolutely particular and ungroupable, a kind of hyper-intersectionality? Or does it make the point, as many critics do, that politics and history should be bracketed in Beckett’s work, first because he is a staunchly apolitical writer, and later because history and politics really are qualitatively unlike personal and aesthetic experiences, apart from when they intersect? And if so, why write a text provocatively universalising torture at a time when torture was *the* headline political story, and went on for years? To put two fingers up to our commitment, proving art’s



autonomy by being unpolitical about something profoundly political? What would be the point of that?

Look for answers to these questions in the text and they are not there with unerring reliability. It homes in on these undecidable moments and freezes us there; it is a one-sided catechism. The only thing that's clear is that the question if, and to what extent, a symbol is symbolic is political. This would be one meaning of the title. *How It Is*, which seems to be demanding to be read as a literal statement of fact, radically destabilises the category of the literal. What is the thing being symbolised, and what is the symbol? Do state actors torture because domination is the rule of individual life, where they learn to want to hurt? Or is that life a kind of after-image of the possibility of torture, its sublime? What comes first in our imaginary? How is it?

## 5. 'The Radiant Measure'.<sup>1</sup>

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*'How much are you out?' she said.  
These words were incomprehensible to Murphy, and remained so until he saw a  
purse in her hand.  
'Twopence', he replied, 'and a critique of pure love.'  
'Here is threepence', said Miss Dew.*

- Beckett, *Murphy* (1938).<sup>2</sup>

If *How It Is* really is how it is, what would it tell us economically? First, there is the economic terminology, at a climactic moment of the text, of 'united net sufferings'.<sup>3</sup> This is what is said to 'move' the 'imbrication', suggesting a metric associated with economic progress (Beckett called this his 'work in regress') (*HII*, 65).<sup>4</sup> The way this is normally calculated is gross domestic product, but here it is specifically – and only in the last of the six typed drafts – '*net suffering*'.<sup>5</sup> So what is being subtracted from it? If this was a neat inversion, it might be some measure of financial gain, but we are told that the economy of *How It Is* runs on 'infinite loss without profit' (*HII*, 143). However it is calculated, this terminology allows Beckett to scale up from the local production and consumption of suffering in transactional pairings to an economy in which 'billions of us' trade partners and roles in a perfectly rationalised matrix of exchange (*HII*, 65). Erotic power asymmetries form the basis of this perfectly rationalised world, bringing out the violence of transactionalised erotic encounters or eroticised economic transactions, which appear to be much the same thing in the world of *How It Is*.

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Murphy*, ed. J. C. C. Mays (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 2009), p. 62.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>3</sup> Beckett, *How It Is: A Critical-Genetic Edition*, ed. Edouard Magessa O'Reilly (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 189.

<sup>4</sup> Beckett used the phrase in a letter to John Calder in 1960. Frederik N. Smith, 'Fiction as Composing Process: *How It Is*', in Morris Beja et. Al., *Samuel Beckett: Humanistic Perspectives* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1983), p. 118.

<sup>5</sup> Beckett, 'Pim' Notebook 6, Series I, Box 1, Folder 11, Samuel Beckett Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, p. 477.

Second, there are the economic objects or resources, jute sacks and tinned fish (*HII*, 5). The difficulty of arranging the distribution of these commodities is what prompts the narrator to imagine the existence of an executive ‘intelligence’, a kind of divine central planner or CEO (*HII*, 181). This is a vivid example of one of Beckett’s key tropes, using economic laws and figures to bathetically skewer metaphysical laws and entities. In this case the target is theodicy’s idea of an omnipotent being, providentially arranging the world for the comfort and prosperity of his creation; Youdi, the Obidil and Godot/Pozzo are his predecessors. Third, there are the economic needs. Need is the decisive element because it marks the intersection of economics, torture and oral sadism. The creatures of *How It Is* have replaced their staple food with human screams, which ‘nourish’ them more than ‘sardines can ever offer’ (*HII*, 189). This substitution is emphatically not *not* about Algerian independence fighters being assaulted with domestic objects, as I have argued. The historical fact of state-sanctioned torture makes displaced or allegorical readings complicit by turning the reader into another consumer of suffering. The formalist elements of the text are a rhetorical device used to implicate the reader in incriminatingly distracting hermeneutic games, games with which we are invited to distract ourselves with while the key referent is brutally and repeatedly shoved in our faces. The scene of reading that the text insists on reproduces the discursive environment Gisèle Halimi described in *Djamila Boupacha* (1962): philosophical ‘clichés’ and performative ‘indignation’ are a distraction at best from real suffering and real efforts to stop it.<sup>6</sup> Fourth, if the creatures use the tin openers on each other, does this mean they are commodities? This idea is consistent with the sense that we, the audience, are being put in a position analogous to that of the narrator, an aesthetic consumer of commoditised suffering. As an inversion of people and things, it is also an

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<sup>6</sup> Gisèle Halimi, *Djamila Boupacha: The Story of the Torture of a Young Algerian Girl Which Shocked Liberal French Opinion*, trans. P. Green (New York: Macmillan 1962), pp. 126-7.

example of the logic of the commodity, which ‘entails the personification of things and the reification of persons’, as Marx puts it in *Capital* (1867).<sup>7</sup>

Beckett did not read *Capital* but this is not an insight that only Marx could arrive at independently. The text’s insistence that ‘I personify it it personifies itself’ is stark evidence that Beckett’s logic of substitution has arrived at the same personifying/reifying conclusion as Marx’s logic of the commodity (*HIII*, 145). The chiasmus of transactionalised erotic encounters or eroticised economic transactions is another example. The logic of the commodity is affecting *How It Is* at a tropological level, just as it does in Marx. In the ‘Preface’ to the first German edition of *Capital* (1867), Marx writes that ‘individuals are dealt with here only in so far as they are the personifications of economic categories, the bearers [*Träger*] of particular class relations’ (Marx 1990, 92). This is an odd moment, because it seems like Marx is politely or shamefacedly allowing the targets of his critique to remain theoretical, offering the bourgeois reader a kind of gentleman’s agreement that he will not condescend to attack him on ad hominem grounds. It is only the word ‘*Träger*’ that might suggest a less genial intent; this is the term Marx uses throughout *Capital* to describe ‘[t]he concept of an object (or person) as a receptacle, repository, bearer of some thing or tendency quite different from it’, as Ernest Mandel puts it (Marx 1990, 179). But the ‘capitalist or the landlord’, flattered by Marx’s apparently courteous detachment, has mistaken ‘*Träger*’ for a complement. He thinks Marx is respecting the objects of his enquiry with due scientific discretion, considering them ‘only in so far as’ they are relevant to the study at hand and no more pryingly than that. It is like the reverence that scientists have for the natural world, or a hunter’s respect for a departed rabbit. The word ‘*Träger*’, in that context, is taken for a placeholder, like cartography or binomial nomenclature. But it is gradually not allowed to be misunderstood as that. This conceptual movement, from a methodological abstraction of concrete realities to

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<sup>7</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital Vol. I*, ed. Ernst Mandel, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 209.

the intimation of a concrete reality of abstraction, is crucial for understanding Marx's critique of political economy. It is also critical for understanding Beckett's 'metaphysical concrete'. In *Capital*, the de-misunderstanding starts happening in the chapter on 'The Process of Exchange', where the conditional 'in so far' of the Preface is found to be true 'in general':

[a]s we proceed to develop our investigation, we shall find, in general, that the characters who appear on the economic stage are merely personifications of economic relations; it is as the bearers of economic relations that they come into contact with each other. (Marx 1990, 179)

Personification is going to stop being a metaphor. '[I]ndividuals' will become what Marx promised they would only be 'dealt with [...] in so far as': the expression of their class interests. They are 'mere personifications', like his system is said to 'appear' as a mere 'a priori construction', not merely being treated as them (Marx 1990, 102, 179). The method by which Marx proposed to discover abstract economic categories has been found to exist in something like reality. The metaphor of the trope of personification has replaced the thing that the metaphor was describing.

It could be objected that the language of 'characters' and 'stage' leaves Marx with an alibi that he still only speaking metaphorically (Marx 1990, 179). But if he has already found that a literary technique is the truth about the process of exchange (and perhaps even economic determinism in general under capitalism), what reason do we have to think the lexis of drama is being used to keep Marx at a safe, rhetorical distance from factual reality? Marx is introducing another layer of artifice, so that the economic world is a make-believe with no outside, a play in which 'individuals', already 'mere personifications', are also inescapably 'characters', inhabiting roles they cannot change, stuck repeating the same lines and movements ('Repeat *Play*').<sup>8</sup> Marx is using the dramatic space in the same way Beckett does, to keep us there, to show us there is nowhere else, to make us want out at maximum potential, impossibility. His 'creatures'

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<sup>8</sup> Beckett, *Play*, in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Dramatic Works*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 2006), p. 317.

are doubly unreal: mouthpieces of fictional voices ‘in’ them that do not belong to them (‘not mine’) even as imaginary characters, ‘stammering’ out lines which are already ventriloquisations (*HII*, 3).<sup>9</sup>

Louis Althusser spells out the consequences of this interpretation of Marx in *Reading Capital* (1956):

The structure of the relations of production determines the places and functions occupied and adopted by the agents of production, who are never anything more than the occupants of these places, in so far as they are “supports” [*Träger*] of these functions. The true ‘subjects’ [...] are therefore not these occupants or functionaries, are not, despite all appearances, the “obviousness” of the “given” of naïve anthropology, “concrete individuals” – [Marx’s] “real men” – but the *definition and distribution of these places and functions. The “true subjects” are these definers and distributors: the relations of production* (and political and ideological social relations). But since these are “relations”, they cannot be thought within the category *subject*.<sup>10</sup>

‘[I]ndividuals’, Althusser writes *Lenin and Philosophy* (1968), ‘are “abstract” with respect to the subjects which they always already are’.<sup>11</sup> In an economy that is totally determined, a ‘place’ or ‘function’ will always have been behind whatever they only apparently choose to do. In Marx’s terms, individuals can never hope to step outside their ‘personifications’, because the personifications will always have been anterior to them. There is nothing outside the determinations of the capitalist closed system, he is saying. The structure ‘determines’ the individuals in it to the extent that they are, as Althusser says, not ‘subjects’. Their speech, actions, even thoughts are secondary to the ‘true subjects’: ‘the definition and distribution of [their] places and functions’.

Althusser’s capitalism ends up looking like Schopenhauer’s ‘will’, a metaphysical motive force that steamrollers through all things. A further comparison with Beckett’s writing suggests itself here. Beckett’s ‘puppets’ in *Murphy* and *The Unnamable*, his creatures of ‘habit’ in *Proust* and his ventriloquist dummies in *How It Is*, would be

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<sup>9</sup> Beckett, *Molloy* in *Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies and The Unnamable* (New York: Grove Press, 2009), p. 27.

<sup>10</sup> Italics remarkably all his. Louis Althusser et. al., *Reading Capital*, trans. B. Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1970), p. 199.

<sup>11</sup> Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: NLB, 1971), p. 161.

Althusserian non-subjects, ‘never anything more than the occupants of [their] places’ in a totally determined system (*Mu*, 123; Althusser 1971, 161).<sup>12</sup> Watt’s (1953) [1945] permutations would be a gruelling parody of unfree labour, all (or nearly all) spontaneity squeezed out by heteronomous instructions, a life levelled to its functions. The switch to theatre may be read in this way, too, as part of an ongoing fascination with a certain kind of impoverished, partial subjectivity, locked into a script (‘I say it as I hear it’), deprived of self-determination by the structures it inhabits (*HII*, 15). Even Beckett’s exacting stage directions, which are sometimes redundant and sometimes painful to enact, could be read as an echo of the capitalist big-Other, an abstract force that keeps people in their ‘places’, miming the roles they have been given, never permitted to depart from the script.<sup>13</sup> The other side of this equation is equally mappable onto Althusser. If it is true that ‘agents of production [...] are never anything more than the occupants of [their] places’, then people who have no place to occupy are free from economic determination. Beckett switches class perspective because profoundly, irrevocably destitute unemployable people have no *Träger* to be personified by. They represent freedom from determination by relations of production by being ‘nothing’ to them, exogenous not only to the models of bourgeois economics, as anyone who has ‘[n]othing to lose’ might be, but ‘essentially’ exogenous to the economic reality it represents, like Vera is ‘essentially a waitress’ (*Mu*, 162, 54).

A classist like Beckett – certainly the ‘young Beckett’ – would find little wrong with Althusser’s claim that ‘weary proletarians’ mechanically fulfil the ‘functions’ assigned to

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<sup>12</sup> Beckett, *The Unnamable*, in *Three Novels*, e.g. p. 289.

<sup>13</sup> E.g. In *Ghost Trio* (1975): a door ‘imperceptibly ajar’. E.g. in *Play* (1963): ‘Front centre, touching one another, three identical grey urns [...] about one yard high. From each a head protrudes, the neck held fast in the urn’s mouth. [...] Their speech is provoked by a spotlight projected on faces alone’. At a yard high, the actor could not be comfortably kneeling; they would have to hold themselves in a crouched position, with their necks ‘held fast’, a spotlight in their faces, throughout a performance that repeats, lasting around 20 minutes. Beckett, *Ghost Trio*, in *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 408. Beckett, *Play*, in *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 307.

them (*Mu*, 54).<sup>14</sup> The problem with that view, as E. P. Thompson devastatingly argues in *The Poverty of Theory* (1978), is that it wrongly deprives all subjects, not only the ‘capitalist or the landlord’ whom Marx singled out, of economic free will (Marx 1990, 179). It is sometimes claimed that Althusser is only referring to ‘the aspects of each person’ that relate to their ‘functions within that system’, or even to the ‘tasks’ they have to ‘perform’, when he says that people are ‘never anything more than’ the ‘places’ and ‘functions’ that the ‘structure of the relations of production’ assigns to them. It is difficult to credit this reading, however, given the emphatic inclusivity of the statement that they are ‘never anything more than the occupants of these places’, even with the borrowed caveat (‘... in so far as they are “supports” of these functions’). Perhaps Althusser does not want to specify just how ‘far’ his ‘agents of production’ ‘are’ the *Träger* of the ‘functions’ they are ‘determined’ by. But if it is really only the individual’s ‘functions’ and ‘tasks’ that are ‘determined’ by ‘the structure of relations of productions’, then Althusser’s revolutionary interpretation of Marx would amount to “people do jobs”. This is presumably not what he is saying.<sup>15</sup>

If Beckett is anywhere on the Althusserian/Schopenhauerian spectrum of determinism, he has two main problems. At the Althusserian end, it is materially obvious that starvation and death from exposure are economic determinations, so that a predicament like that of the narrator of ‘The Expelled’ (1973) [1946], characterised by him as ‘the absolute impossibility of all purchase’, does not entail its pun.<sup>16</sup> The grip you have on things might both be related to the ability to be an active participant in the economy; but the grip they have on you is not. Having ‘[n]othing to lose’, as Celia observes through Geulincx, does not entail having everything, or even anything, ‘to

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<sup>14</sup> Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett’s German Diaries 1936-1937* (London: Continuum, 2011), p. 178. Beckett, ‘Ding-Dong’, in *More Pricks Than Kicks*, ed. Cassandra Nelson (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), p. 36.

<sup>15</sup> The defence is provided by Russell Keat and John Urry, here. Keat and Urry, *Social Theory as Science* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 100.

<sup>16</sup> Beckett, ‘The Expelled’, in S. E. Gontarski (ed.), *The Complete Short Prose of Samuel Beckett, 1929–1989* (New York: Grove Press, 1995), p. 49.



gain' (*Mu*, 142). It is certainly no reprieve from economic determination, as the narrator of 'The Expelled' well knows. At the more plausible Schopenhauerian end, it is violently appropriative to thematise abstract freedom using victims of economic violence, as I discussed in the introduction. However, this was Beckett's advertised position in 1948, when he was content to belittle the 'mere misery where destitute virtuous mothers may steal bread for their starving brats', a second-hand kind of unhappiness compared to the real trial of aesthetic poverty.<sup>17</sup> If we take his word here seriously, we would expect to find the texts making use of unimportant economic realities like poverty and starving brats to strengthen metaphysically-inflected aesthetic categories. The domestic service narrative in *Watt* would do no damage to its undertones of apophatic theology and religious asceticism; and Murphy's situation as a poor Irish migrant failing to find, then survive, menial employment would not affect the near-spiritual value he assigns to his 'little world' of narcissistic anhedonia (*Mu*, 6). This is not the case. Godot and his 'bank account' do affect the play's allegorical content, making it a heartrending parody of the need for redemptive allegories.<sup>18</sup> The fact that Knott is an eccentric landlord with a retinue of servants does the same: the text cannot be an allegory for quietist negative equilibrium, 'the poem [...] in the depths where demand and supply coincide', because the quietism theme is mercilessly mocked by, for example, the derivatives market Watt sets up to efficiently dispose of Knott's dinner with a family of entrepreneurial inbreeding peasants and their colony of sex-worker dogs.<sup>19</sup> Initially, then, we can say that Beckett seems to introduce economic content whenever an idea or aesthetic conceit is in danger of becoming too allegorically coherent. Economic tropes are used to subvert symbols about art and metaphysics that would otherwise resonate too unambiguously. But why

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<sup>17</sup> Beckett, 'Three Dialogues with George Duthuit', in Ruby Cohn (ed.), *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment* (New York: Grove Press, 1983), p. 143.

<sup>18</sup> Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, in *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 20.

<sup>19</sup> Beckett, *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Vol 1, 1929-1940*, eds. George Craig, Martha Dow Fehsenfeld, Dan Gunn and Lois More Overbeck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 274.

economics? It is as if it is a readymade bathos for idealism, or where idealist themes like spiritual redemption and quietist indifference are really rooted, and belong. The number of equivalences between German metaphysics and economics are quite striking, after all, as Marx found with Hegel's idealist dialectics.

Terry Eagleton has commented on the preponderance of economic metaphors in Schopenhauer's writing. '[S]tructurally speaking', he writes, the will resembles 'one enormous marketplace', 'elevated to cosmic status and transformed to the prime metaphysical mover of the entire universe'.<sup>20</sup> Schopenhauer himself goes further than this, explicitly invoking Thomas Hobbes's economic sociology. His metaphysical 'world of constantly needy creatures who continue for a time merely devouring one another, pass their existence in anxiety and want [...] until they fall into the arms of death' is the material world of Hobbes's '*bellum omnium contra omnes*', the war of all against all.<sup>21</sup> Merely putting an idea like this back in contact with messily everyday things like work and need and money and reproduction, anything that it tendentiously excludes, dramatically changes its meaning. Murphy on the 'jobpath' might be a local branch of the will, evicted from happy non-existence and coaxed into activity by money and sex, but what does that do to the metaphysical grandeur of Schopenhauer's system? (*Mu*, 46) First, it makes it a bathetic afterimage of the stupid contingencies and abstract imperatives of life in London in the mid-1930s. Then it transforms those contingencies and imperatives into something *like* metaphysical laws. The symbolic relationship between idealism and economics is a two-way street, bringing abstractions down to earth and making economic laws and circumstances seem unchanging and inescapable (as Althusser does). Whether Beckett thought they really were or not is immaterial. It is on the brink of that question that his work is most politically active. Whether the system we die under is economically or metaphysically immutable does not make much

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<sup>20</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Culture and the Death of God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), p. 153. Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 160.

<sup>21</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Presentation, Vol 1*, trans. Richard E. Aquila (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 389.

difference to its subjects. But it is not immutable and it is not metaphysical. From a certain angle, Beckett looks like a later, more hopeless, Althusser-like Marx who loves Joyce and philosophical pessimism instead of Hegel and gothic fiction (they both loved the Socratics). Putting Schopenhauer back on his feet, Beckett's economic fiction could be among the most rhetorically activating critiques of political economy we have, though this is not how his work is generally received.

Beckett's economics also points to a possible way out, however silly, from the double bind of solipsistic subjective value and abstract objective value. I concluded chapter 1 with a discussion of *Murphy's* death-defying lunch and the solipsism of subjective value under the regime of marginal utility. Here is what happens next in that novel:

On his knees now before the five it struck him for the first time that these prepossessions reduced to a paltry six the number of ways in which he could make this meal. But this was to violate the very essence of assortment, this was red permanganate on the Rima of variety. Even if he conquered his prejudice against the anonymous, still there would be only twenty-four ways in which the biscuits could be eaten. But were he to take the final step and overcome his infatuation with the ginger, then the assortment would spring to life before him, dancing the radiant measure of its total permutability, edible in a hundred and twenty ways! (*Mu*, 62)

On his knees as though in supplication, Murphy is struck by an impossibility. If he could only eliminate his preferences, he would be free to enjoy one hundred and twenty possible combinations of experience, rather than six or twenty-four. But why does Murphy, who does not seem especially fond of phenomenal experiences, want to multiply the number of them available to him? Schopenhauer might say: because the elimination of preference is a kind of reprieve, if not an outright escape, from the suffering of the will decanted into the individual organism. The fewer active 'wish[es]' the subject is subject to, the less he must suffer from obligatory motion sickness on the swings and roundabouts of desire.<sup>22</sup> But Schopenhauer also specifically states that it is 'the throng' and multiplicity of aims that makes suffering so keen ('[t]he satisfaction of a wish ends it; yet for one wish that is satisfied there remain at least ten which are

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<sup>22</sup> As in chapter 1, I have preferred Kemp and Haldane's translation for this passage. Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, Vol. I, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Kegan Paul, 1909), p. 253-4.

denied...' he moans (Schopenhauer 1909, 253)). The best we can hope for, in that universe, is to turn away as much business as possible from the local branch of the will, our little lives rounded with a 'sheep' [sic] (*Mu*, 63). But Murphy is longing not for a mere ten wishes, he is longing for 20 times the number of wishes currently at his disposal. Anything less than the sum of possible combinations of experience is, in his unusually passionate analogy, like fascists vandalising the first naked public statue in London, a historical detail that invests this passage with a political seriousness that has been overlooked or misinterpreted by Beckett criticism.

Unveiled by Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin in 1925, Jacob Epstein's 'Rima' statue provoked a 'hullabaloo' in the British press.<sup>23</sup> Baldwin, hilariously, had no prior knowledge of the statue's subject matter before he unveiled it (Friedman 1988, 40). Chris Ackerley suggests that the 'red permanganate' is a way of 'disguising the debt' that Beckett's portrayal of the Smeraldina-Rima owes to W. H. Hudson's 'wild girl' in *Green Mansions: A Romance of the Tropical Forest* (1904).<sup>24</sup> It is possible Beckett had this in mind, but red permanganate was, *pace* Ackerley, actually used to deface the statue. According to a report in *The Times* on the 7<sup>th</sup> of October 1935, it was 'disfigured' with 'permanganate of potash'; the culprits were later identified as the "Independent Fascist League", who 'attached a card emblazoned with a Swastika and the inscription "God Save Our King and Britain from the Cancer of Judah"'.<sup>25</sup> Given that Beckett was 'appall[ed]' by Nazi anti-Semitism, his Jewish aunt and uncle already having been forced to leave Germany in 1933, this deplorable vandalism suggests some political seriousness on his behalf that is at odds with the passage's comic tone.<sup>26</sup> It also adds a tellingly sexual dimension to the theme of object-choice, again comically undermined by the triviality of the objects in question.

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<sup>23</sup> Terry Friedman, *The Hyde Park Atrocity: Epstein's Rima, Creation and Controversy* (Leeds: Henry Moore Sculpture Trust, 1988), p. 31.

<sup>24</sup> C. J. Ackerley, *Demented Particulars: The Annotated Murphy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 107-8.

<sup>25</sup> 'News in Brief', *The Times*, 9 Oct. 1935: 9, *The Times Digital Archive*, Web, 18 March 2017.

<sup>26</sup> James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), p. 238, 183.

There is a critical tradition that regards Beckett's '*ars combinatoria*' as a way of 'exhausting the possible', either as a parody of excessive belief in the powers of reason over matter (Leibniz's thought that the universe is ticking off every iteration of things), or as an instructive failure of them, a last ditch manoeuvre to forestall total despair by proving negatively that something will always not have been accounted for (the more hopeless a situation might seem, the more hope sides with the possibility of being wrong about it).<sup>27</sup> This hopeless exhaustion is why the tone of Beckett's combinatorial writing tends to range from eerily affectless (e.g. *Quad* (1984)) to assiduously masochistic (e.g. *Watt*). It is hard to imagine a style of combinatorial writing that didn't come from characters or narrators who are not conspicuously unaware or neglectful of their well-being, in the same way it is hard to stop a critique of value from asserting its value at the second remove. Let's say Beckett is asserting the unqualified worthlessness of painstaking permutative writing, from a perspective he deems to be minimally unreliable given immutable conditions, which is what he seems to think he is doing. What would that *mean*? Nothing, comes the reply, and it immediately takes on the glamour of stoicism, bravely confronting the void etc., i.e. it takes on value. The same principle applies when Molloy claims that if he knew of a predicament worse than his he would be have sought it out already (*Mo*, 41). The desire to eliminate value suggests that value is unbearably valuable, not that it isn't; think of Estragon's claiming he has never been to the 'Cackon Country', or Nagg denying Nell was 'happy', or Moran's 'hellish hope' (*Go*, 102; *Mo*, 128). Murphy's radiant biscuits are exhausting their possibilities in a very different key. He has been playing a game with finitude already, organising his preferences as if he had all the time in the world. This thought 'spring[s] to life' out of the same desire. The prose is lyrical and epiphanic: the metaphors are luminous ('red permanganate') and erotic (Epstein's 'Rima'), the grammar is

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<sup>27</sup> E.g. Gilles Deleuze, 'The Exhausted', trans. Anthony Uhlmann, *SubStance*, Vol. 24, No. 3, Issue 78 (1995), pp. 3-28. Simon Critchley, *Very Little... Almost Nothing* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 179-81. Asja Szafraniec, *Beckett, Derrida, and the Event of Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), pp. 92-117.

uninhibited by commas ('[o]n his knees now before the five it struck him...') and the syntax is stretched to gasping point. Compare this expressive language with the tired, halting grammar of even just a few lines up, four almost equal length clauses counteracting each other, or stacking up, or collapsing in a heap: 'he always ate the first-named last, because he liked it the best, and the anonymous first, because he thought it very likely the least palatable' (*Mu*, 62). (The opening sentence is the type in *Murphy*: '[t]he sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new' (*Mu*, 3).) It could be argued that the lyricism of this passage is a form of grammatical hyperbole, complementing the theme of disproportionately valuing things. But the little irony in evidence – the faintly histrionic exclamation mark, the comic image of biscuits cavorting – is more than off-set by the protective bathos of those obscure Latinate polysyllables ('permanganate' and 'permutability'), adding rhythmic structure and a kind of aloof scientism to defend the radiant measure from sentiment, or the whole passage from a more than prophylactic dose of bathos.

The joke is that anyone could get so starry-eyed about biscuits, but that joke is itself premised on the assumption of a shared hierarchy of categories of preferences, where people get starry-eyed about love and art and politics, but not about flour-based food products. In the introduction I discussed Kant's taxonomy of aesthetic experiences in the *Critique of Judgement* (1790), which thinks of disinterestedness as a basis for universality.<sup>28</sup> This is another way that Murphy is tempting fate: by preferring the pathologically individual aspects of preference rather than trying to become 'more universal', as *How It Is* might say, by cultivating tastes at the top of the hierarchy (*HII*, 85). But the logic of his proposition entails the elimination of any preference for hierarchies of preference, meaning that biscuits can take their place among 'the starry sky' and 'the moral law' as worthy objects of 'awe and reverence'.<sup>29</sup> Beckett, who noted

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<sup>28</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. J. H. Bernard (New York: Dover Publications, 2005), p. 32-7.

<sup>29</sup> Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, ed. and trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 129.

down Freud's wry comment about Kant in his 'Whoroscope' notebook, '[t]he stars are undoubtedly superb', may even be thinking of him here:<sup>30</sup>

Overcome by these perspectives Murphy fell forward on his face on the grass, beside those biscuits of which it could be said as truly as of the stars, that one differed from another, but of which he could not partake in their fullness until he had learnt not to prefer any one to any other. (*Mu*, 62)

It is only through a kind of disinterested enjoyment of his biscuits that Murphy can hope to appreciate their 'differe[nce]' from one another. This might be for the same reason that Kant believed the interested subject was disqualified from universality, though Murphy's ecstasy does not seem to have much in common with his tranquil, undesiring counterpart, who can 'claim validity for everyone' in his judgement 'want is appeased', and he is free from the tragic particularity of 'hunger', i.e. after lunch, not in the very throes of it (Kant 2005, 33). Particularity is the gift of not preferring, but not because Murphy stands apart from them as a perceiver unclouded by appetite, Bourdieu's monstrous aristocrat of taste. He is not thinking of not eating them, after all. The 'fullness' of their difference would not be available to him if he confined his desire to eating the biscuits in no order, no more than it is available when he confined his desire to eating them in one order. Murphy very specifically wants to eat them in every order. It is a literally ec-static proposition to him, because he is imagining a standpoint removed from time's winged budget constraint. If he could eat the biscuits in every order, he would not have to eat the biscuits in any particular order. If he did not have to eat the biscuits in any particular order, it would be because he did not have a curtailed life to eat them in. The text is not oblivious of this ridiculous intimation of immortality; a few lines up we find a reference to that very poem:

Murphy had never seen stranger sheep, they seemed one and all on the point of collapse. They made the exposition of Wordsworth's lovely 'fields of sleep' as a compositor's error for 'fields of sheep' seem no longer a jibe at that most excellent man. (*Mu*, 63)

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<sup>30</sup> Beckett, 'Three Dialogues with George Duthuit', in *Disjecta*, p. 141. Sigmund Freud, 'New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis' (1933), in James Strachey (ed. and trans.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Vintage, 2001), p. 61.

No more shall grief of mine the season wrong;  
I hear the Echoes through the mountains throng,  
The Winds come to me from the fields of sleep,  
And all the earth is gay<sup>31</sup>

The scene anticipates the one to come with premeditated accuracy. The sheep are, like Murphy will be, ‘on the point of collapse’ (‘Murphy fell forwards on his face...’). They are also an emblem of banality in a lyrical meditation, just as his biscuits will be. But instead of crumbling under the bathos of it, they take on the luminous qualities of their ‘lovely’ counterpoint: these sheep make the bathos of a compositor’s error unbathetic. Likewise, the total permutability of biscuits make the lyricism of their poetic dedication to immortality unbathetic. Both of them, biscuits and sheep, are a bathos on the possibilities of using them as a bathos, to borrow a formulation from the introduction. Wordsworth’s Ode has crept up on Murphy in the form of a sheep, just as death creeps up on him in the form of a sausage dog. The sheep is what is necessary to correct a mistake in what is lyrically permissible in an ode on immortality. Total permutability is what, in this crossfire of bathos and lyricism, does that for Beckett, too. Murphy’s profane judgement is that only a total permutability of the objects of care, in which they are not being made commensurable for the purpose of ranking in accordance with individual preference, allows their particularity to emerge. Anything less than indifference screens out the fulness of difference, where this is not Kant’s evacuated universal aesthete or Schopenhauer listening to music, but an actively perceiving, desiring, willing stance. My life is not the idiosyncratic profile of impetuses and

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<sup>31</sup> William Wordsworth, *The Major Works*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 298.



aversions that I ‘undergo’, any more than it is the unique class fraction I am personified by, my absolutely differentiated repertoire of preferences (the distinction of Kant’s pathological subject no less than Bourdieu’s consumer). Perhaps nihilistically, perhaps utopianly, this permutability denies the reality of death, by refusing the ultimate condition of scarcity which underlies all want, all decisions to be or do or have *this* rather than *that*: the silly limitedness of the human lifespan. In this sense, narrowly, *How It Is* might have some utopian content, if we want to find an image of care and interest that is not conditional on the abstract interchangeability of power standpoints that that text excuses itself by offering. But *Murphy*’s radiant biscuits, his ‘critique of pure love’, is a happier example.

## 6: Postscript: 'Life in Common'.<sup>1</sup>

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*At the end of endless ramifications in terms of hypochondriacal fantasy and persecutory delusion a patient has a dream which says: I eat you.*

- D. W. Winnicott, 'The Aims of Psycho-Analytic Treatment' (1962).<sup>2</sup>

This thesis has considered Beckett's prose texts from 1932 to 1964, because this was the period of writing during which he concerned himself most with economic themes and structures. But this relatively limited scope of enquiry naturally invites the question of how my reading might extend to Beckett's later works.

The short and unsatisfying answer is that it doesn't, with one or two exceptions. My sense is that Beckett's politics, such as they were, drifted further away from material concerns as he grew older, and as the War and financial hardship receded from memory. *Catastrophe* (1980), a piece written for Victor Havel, is a political exception, but there is no economic content to be found in that play.

'The Lost Ones' (1971) [1970], however, describes in almost comically undisplaced terms a society of aggressive social climbers trying to find a lover or, failing that, an individualistic niche. There are the usual resistances to a starkly literal reading, so the text conforms closely to my interpretation of Beckett's economic writing as a crossfire of the metaphysical and the concrete, with the allegorical remainder being like grit jamming the materialist dialectic, barring the reader's descent from representation to particularity. The text invites us to see it as 'a cruelly gripping account of a social system that is at once self-enclosed and parallel to those we know'; or the story of 'a place of

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<sup>1</sup> David Lloyd, *Irish Culture and Colonial Modernity 1800–2000: The Transformation of Oral Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 87.

<sup>2</sup> D. W. Winnicott, 'The Aims of Psycho-Analytic Treatment', in Lesley Caldwell and Helen Taylor Robinson (eds.), *The Collected Works of D. W. Winnicott, Vol. 6, 1960–1963* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 286.

systematic polity teetering on the edge of anarchy', as Ruby Cohn, John Pilling and James Knowlson have put it.<sup>3</sup> But of course it can't be read like that, because it is also about an ancient cylinder with arbitrary dimensions oscillating inexplicably through extremes of temperature. The creatures that live there are human-like without being human; they are subject to centuries of entropy; and so on. The referential content is, as always, distorted to block any straightforward allegorical reading. If it wasn't, 'The Lost Ones' could be read like *Animal Farm* (1945) or any other didactic transposition of material facts; and its shortcomings would be the same. The reader of Beckett cannot be allowed to translate back from the impossible to the possible. It makes no difference whether it is a utopia or a dystopia, as Brian McHale suggests; a dystopian critique still carries the possibility of the world it is not yet.<sup>4</sup> We must not be allowed to bring Beckett's worlds out of inexistence, because art is not life, and its complex and undecidable relation to life is part of its political content.

Aside from 'The Lost Ones', there is one later text that entwines many of the preoccupations of this thesis. In 'Company' (1979), a young child – 'you' – takes pity on a hedgehog in the cold.<sup>5</sup> '[G]lowing at the thought of what a fortunate hedgehog it was to have a crossed your path', you remove it to a box, leave some food for it, and go to bed. Overnight 'a great uneasiness' arises in you. Having seen in the creature only a reflection of your goodness, it comes to represent your shame in doing so. Where care and consciousness of other life had been, you merely find yourself, alone and greedy for the intrapsychic rewards of good behaviour. '[Y]ou cannot bring yourself' to revisit the site of such an awful revelation. You must destroy this thing that is your lonely self-flattery, your effacement of otherness on the pretext of care. When you eventually

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<sup>3</sup> Ruby Cohn, *A Beckett Canon* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2001), p. 313. James Knowlson and John Pilling, *Frescoes of the Skull: The Later Prose and Drama of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Grove Press, 1980), p. 167.

<sup>4</sup> Brian McHale, 'Lost in the Mall: Beckett, Federman, Space', in Christopher Devenney and Henry Sussman (eds.), *Engagement and Indifference: Beckett and the Political* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001), p. 115.

<sup>5</sup> Samuel Beckett, 'Company', in *Nohow On* (London: Calder, 1989), p. 23.

return, what you discover is not the reality of an otherness which has survived your fantasy of destruction, but a festering corpse (Co, 24). Where you expected to find an other at the limits of your power – to find love, in Winnicott's terms – what you discover is its absence. You are as you always have been, 'alone':

You now on your back in the dark shall not rise to your arse again to clasp your legs in your arms and bow down your head till it can bow down no further. But with face upturned for good labour in vain at your fable. Till finally you hear how words are coming to an end. With every inane word a little nearer to the last. And how the fable too. The fable of one with you in the dark. The fable of one fabling of one with you in the dark. And how better in the end labour lost and silence. And you as you always were.

Alone. (Co, 50)

If it weren't for the tender precision of the lines that preceded it, the end of this story could be from a teenager's diary. It is stereotypically bad confessional writing. The last word is indented to formally mimic its content. The faint paradox of an apophatic declaration of loneliness is pure attention-seeking, proving its insulting mendacity by attempting to be clever for a pretend non-audience. As literary devices go, these are so defencelessly bathetic that they could surely only mean something else. But what could it be, for Beckett the 73-year-old adolescent?

Knowlson reports the hedgehog incident as an event that probably occurred to Beckett as a child.<sup>6</sup> But even as a biographical fact, it would not have escaped Beckett's notice that the hedgehog is an image of social ambivalence in philosophical history. In *Parerga und Paralipomena* (1851), Schopenhauer uses the porcupine to describe the predicament of individuals in society: they are too prickly to share their warmth yet too cold to survive without it.<sup>7</sup> This is a meaningful coincidence that Beckett must have been attracted to. From a psychoanalytic perspective, it is interesting to note that the boy is playing mother to the hedgehog; he is feeding it as Winnicott's baby attempts to

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<sup>6</sup> James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996) p. 652.

<sup>7</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena: Short Philosophical Essays, Vol 2*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 651.

feed the mother with his finger in reparation for its aggressive fantasies. As I discuss in chapter 3, Winnicott's baby is threatened by its dependency on an 'object' (its caregiver) and 'destroys' them in 'fantasy'.<sup>8</sup> When the object is seen to outlive its destruction, the baby can recognise the object as something external to them and immune to their fantasies. The baby is grateful and tries to make up for its anger by mimicking gestures like feeding. For Winnicott, no "shared" reality' can be maintained without this continual process of unrealised destructive fantasy. We are always destroying the other and they are always surviving (Winnicott 2005, 155). If they do not survive then the integument separating self and other, fantasy and reality, disintegrates leaving the subject omnipotently 'alone'.

Marx argues that 'the independence of the individuals from each other has as its counterpart and supplement a system of all-round material dependence'.<sup>9</sup> As the division of labour becomes more 'scattered' and 'haphazard', we depend more on society as a whole (Marx 1990, 202). Jessica Benjamin has observed that the rhetoric around social security and the state provision of healthcare is infantilising ("the nanny state" etc.), suggesting that this is a vestigial, sexist repudiation of helplessness and dependency on a caregiving other.<sup>10</sup> But the state is only a more visible, personified reflection of that helplessness. As adults we are dependent on the "shared" reality' of social existence as we depended on caregivers as children. If the psychoanalytic model is correct, that shared reality is only possible if the objects on whom we depend are able to survive our unconscious fantasies of destruction.

In *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* (2005), Axel Honneth discusses the striking similarities between Winnicott's theory of child development and G. W. F. Hegel's chapter on 'Self-Consciousness' in *The*

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<sup>8</sup> Winnicott, 'The Use of an Object and Relating through Identifications', in *Playing and Reality* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 121, p. 120.

<sup>9</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital Vol. I*, ed. Ernst Mandel, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990), pp. 202-3.

<sup>10</sup> Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problem of Domination* (New York: Random House, 1988), p. 202-3.

*Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807).<sup>11</sup> While Hegel ‘sought to demonstrate that a subject can arrive at a “consciousness” of its own “self” only if it enters into a relationship of “recognition” with another subject’, Winnicott describes the psychoanalytic process by which a child comes to recognise and respect otherness through unrealised destructive fantasy:<sup>12</sup>

[b]oth seem to claim that this subject strives, through the need-driven consumption of its environment, to acquire the individual certainty that the reality it faces is on the whole a product of its own mental activity. In the course of this striving, however, it is confronted with the fact that, as Hegel puts it, the world retains its “independence”, since its existence is not dependent on the survival of its individual elements. (Honneth 2008, 76-7)

It is clear enough where ‘consumption’ comes into Winnicott’s theory of mutual recognition. The baby’s helplessness expresses itself in ‘fantasies of oral sadism’, and he or she associates destruction with consumption.<sup>13</sup> Honneth, on the other hand, is referring to a specific ‘moment’ in Hegel’s dialectic of the subject, ‘The Truth of Self-Certainty’, that describes a primitive, ‘consuming’ stance towards the external world.<sup>14</sup> This proto-subject – any living being – sets out to achieve a ‘feeling of unity with itself’ by consuming the bodies of other living things (Hegel 1952, 108). This behaviour arises from the necessity of maintaining an antithesis between the finitude of the animal and the infinity of ‘Life’ (defined in *The Philosophy of Right* (1820) as ‘[t]he comprehensive sum of external activity’).<sup>15</sup> The animal, writes Hegel, ‘comes forward in antithesis to the universal substance, disowns this fluent continuity with it and asserts that it is not dissolved in this universal element’ (Hegel 1952, 107). The living thing must not be

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<sup>11</sup> Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, trans. Joel Anderson (Cambridge, Ma: MIT Press, 2005), p. 98-106.

<sup>12</sup> Honneth, ‘From Desire to Recognition: Hegel’s Account of Human Sociality’, in Dean Moyar and Michael Quante (eds.), *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 76.

<sup>13</sup> Winnicott, ‘Discussion: The Difficult Child, with G. A. Auden’, in Lesley Caldwell and Helen Taylor Robinson (eds.), *The Collected Works of D. W. Winnicott, Vol. 6, 1960-1963*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 354.

<sup>14</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 35.

<sup>15</sup> Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), p. 56.

prematurely ‘dissolved’ into the ‘universal element’ of Life, just as Freud’s organism must proceed by detours to its end, since Life is continuity made possible by differentiated, finite living things. By consuming otherness, the living thing asserts that ‘it is *itself*’ because ‘existence belongs to *it*’, and not the other way around, as Katharine Loevy paraphrases it.<sup>16</sup> The living thing ‘preserves itself by separating itself’ from Life: I eat you, therefore I am not you (Hegel 1952, 107). Or as Hegel puts it in *Philosophy of Nature* (1842), its ‘subjectivity’ is ‘posited’ ‘by the negation of its other’.<sup>17</sup>

In his *Lectures on Fine Arts* (1818-1829), however, Hegel states that

[i]n this *appetitive* relation to the external world, man, as a sensuous individual, confronts things as being individuals; [...] in accord with *individual impulses and interests*, he relates himself to the objects, individuals themselves, and maintains himself in them by using and *consuming* them, and by *sacrificing them works his own self-satisfaction*. In this negative relation, desire requires for itself not merely the superficial appearance of external things, but the things themselves in their concrete physical existence [...] *Neither can desire let the object persist in its freedom*, for its impulse drives it just to cancel this independence and freedom of external things, and to show that *they are only there to be destroyed and consumed*. But at the same time the person too, caught up in the individual, restricted, and nugatory interests of his desire, is neither free in himself, since he is not determined by the essential universality and rationality of his will, nor free in respect of the external world, for desire remains essentially determined by external things and related to them.<sup>18</sup>

In Hegel’s terms, the consumer is characterised by a purely ‘appetitive’, ‘negative’ attitude to objects. As in the theory of marginal utility, the value of a thing is related solely to the subject’s wants. When those wants are satisfied, the object loses its value – which is to say it loses its existence as an object distinct from the subject, since satisfaction entails an identification of the object with the subject’s wants (an ‘identification of the subject with the object of his desire’, as Beckett says in *Proust*

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<sup>16</sup> Katharine Loevy, ‘Confronting Natural Death in Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit’, *PhaenEx: Journal of Existential and Phenomenological Theory and Culture*, No. 1 (2010), p. 64.

<sup>17</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 404.

<sup>18</sup> Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Arts, Vol. 1*, trans. T. M. Knox, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 36.

(1930)).<sup>19</sup> Like *How It Is*, Hegel uses eating as a paradigm for this type of encounter, because the object is internalised by the subject and ceases to exist as a separate entity. But in a sense the object never existed as a separate entity at all, as its reality was always perceived only in terms of the wants of the subject, for whom it only existed as a reflection of those wants. In this way the primitive subject, which Hegel actually specifies as the ‘*consuming*’ subject, cannot be said to have any free relation to external reality. Existing as ‘he’ does only in relation to his ‘individual, restricted, and nugatory interests’, his attempt to ‘cancel [the] independence and freedom of external things’ has spectacularly backfired. Not only is he no longer free in himself; he is also now ironically determined by the very external things he had attempted to cancel through consumption.

Hegel’s consuming subject has ‘sacrificed’ the external things on which he depends for his independent existence. His subjectivity, such as it is, was ‘posited by the negation of its other’; and there he stays, stranded from himself and from the external world indefinitely. In Winnicott’s terms, the consuming subject (‘baby’) does the same thing, but in fantasy: they must also destroy the object on whom they depend, but it must survive, instantiating boundaries, a sense of inner self, respect for otherness, and so on. If it does not make it there, then Winnicott’s baby is left in the position of Hegel’s consumer. Having no free relation to itself or to its other, it is ‘dissolved’ in the ‘universal element’ from which it was trying to ‘differentiate’ itself. Its ‘self-assertion’ is a defence-mechanism, the most primitive way of avoiding ‘undifferentiated’ oneness, by ‘negating its other’ through consumption.

At the beginning of the thesis, I discussed how a theory of value emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that prioritised subjective needs. That theory was a reaction to ‘the psychology of the consumer’, as Nikolai Bukharin puts it, which in turn responded to a

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<sup>19</sup> Beckett, *Proust*, in *Proust and Three Dialogues with George Duthuit* (London: John Calder Publishers, 1999), p. 3.



change in material conditions obtaining to finance, consumer credit, and production-line technology.<sup>20</sup> Bukharin observes that, while the psychology of the consumer exists exclusively in the ‘sphere of consumption’, ‘the proletariat lives in the sphere of production, com[ing] in direct contact with “matter,” from which it is transformed into “material,” into an object of labour’ (Bukharin 1972, 26). The sphere of consumption, understood in Hegel and Winnicott’s terms, never comes into contact with labour as labour, and therefore with the ‘independence and freedom of external things’. That consumer must not let the other ‘persist in its freedom’, because their independence, at this primitive stage, depends on the negation of its other. In Winnicott and Hegel, consuming things repudiates dependency on them, blocking the progression that is crucial to arrive at a mutual recognition of subjects. The psychology of the consumer must be partly a defence against the division of labour, or dependency on everybody: a regressive hope to freeze the dialectic of the subject at its first moment, that of self-assertion and negation of the other.

It is no coincidence that *How It Is* and ‘Company’ end the same way, with the protagonist ‘alone’. Both stage the failure of Hegel’s subject to move on from this first moment, representative of the psychology of the consumer. The narrators are left alone because the other has been destroyed in reality rather than fantasy, failing to confirm their independent existence precisely out of a fear of dependency. The younger Marx tells us explicitly that ‘alienated labour’ blocks subjects from ‘manifest[ing]’ themselves in the products of their labour.<sup>21</sup> Without manifestation, there can be no mutual recognition of subjects. We take only what we recognise of ourselves in the other, a reflection of Kant’s ‘pathological’ needs; and they do the same. But by seeing nothing in otherness but our needs and desires, we destroy the other in reality, not in fantasy; and

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<sup>20</sup> Nikolai Bukharin, *Economic Theory of the Leisure Class*, trans. Ted Crawford (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), p. 27.

<sup>21</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Mulligan (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1970), p. 181.

that, as Winnicott tells us, is fatal to the development of a 'shared reality', or what Beckett might call 'life in common'.

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*Literary criticism is not book-keeping.*

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